A Heart's Bloom

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A Heart's Bloom

by karinakamichi

Summary

Hanahaki Disease, a rare and mysterious illness where unrequited love takes root in the victim's lungs, causing flowers to bloom and slowly choke the life out of them. The only cure? Love returned in kind, or death.

Chapter 1

Story: A Heart's Bloom

Summary: Hanahaki Disease: a rare and mysterious illness where unrequited love takes root in the victim's lungs, causing flowers to bloom and slowly choke the life out of them. The only cure? Love returned in kind, or death.

I don't own Dragon Ball…

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Goku didn't know when his admiration of Vegeta began to transform into something more complex. Perhaps it was the way he moved in combat with purpose and effortless grace. Maybe it was the way Vegeta's intense passion and dedication to strength drew Goku in, making him want to reach even greater heights. Or it could have been the way they challenged each other, pushed each other to their limits, and brought out the best in each other. Whatever it was, Goku found himself increasingly distracted by Vegeta's presence.

No matter how much he tried, he couldn't shake the way he was feeling about Vegeta. He tried to tell himself it was just because they were rivals, or friends, but as the more they trained together, the more he found himself admiring the way his muscles moved, how they flexed and coiled with his every move. He often caught himself staring at him, trying to figure out what was going on in his head, but he always looked so intense and focused.

He longed to touch him, to feel his warmth and strength against him. He wanted to be closer to him, to run his fingers through his hair, and to feel the power of his body. Just the thought of even holding his hand gave him a thrill.

But he knew he had to keep those feelings hidden, or else Vegeta would never want to be near him again. And the fear that Vegeta would reject him, that he'd hate him if he found out, was too much to bear.

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Eventually, the realization started to sink in for Goku. The way he felt when he was with Vegeta, how his heart quickened every time they sparred or simply talked. The strange emptiness he felt when Vegeta wasn't around. Goku began to understand that what he was feeling wasn't just admiration or rivalry, but something deeper, something that made his cheeks flush and his stomach flutter.

He was in love with Vegeta.

The simple realization brought forth a sense of shame. Goku knew that men weren't supposed to like other men. What he was feeling was wrong and unnatural. And the idea that Vegeta, who had never shown any interest in him, could never return his feelings only added to his torment.

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As time went on, Goku's feelings only grew stronger against his will. He found himself looking for any excuse to spar with Vegeta, secretly hoping for the thrill of their bodies moving together. But when Vegeta began to pull away, Goku's confusion and frustration only heightened.

He wondered if he had done something wrong, and the growing emptiness in his heart only seemed to deepen the more he longed for the prince's presence.

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The pain in Goku's chest started out small and subtle, a tightness that he tried to ignore. Each time their sparring sessions ended and they went their separate ways, a wave of loneliness washed over Goku, and the tightness in his chest worsened, as if his very soul was crying out for Vegeta's presence. The pain wasn't just physical anymore; it was as if his very being was protesting the separation. It felt like an invisible hand was squeezing his heart, making it harder to breathe.

As the days went by, the pain grew deeper, more constant, until it seemed to consume him completely. He found himself rubbing his chest, trying to ease the pain, but nothing worked. It had grown from a dull ache to a sharp, stabbing feeling, as if a cold knife was slicing through his heart; as if… his life force was tied to Vegeta's presence. Vegeta's absence was silently killing him.

…

Goku's lungs burned with every exhale, sweat dripping from his brow as he exchanged heavy blows with his rival. His heart thumped heavily in his chest, but it wasn't solely due to the exertion. Every time their gazes met, a strange feeling twisted in his gut - something he couldn't quite place.

He gritted his teeth as he was slammed into the ground by one of Vegeta's attacks.

The pain in his chest had become unbearable. Every breath was pure agony. He could barely stand up straight, but he didn't want to show it. He refused to let Vegeta see how much this was affecting him.

But as they continued to battle, Vegeta began to notice something was off with Goku. He seemed slower, more sluggish than usual.

"What's wrong with you, Kakarot?" Vegeta sneered, looking down at Goku as he lay sprawled on the ground. "Stop screwing around and fight me already. I don't have all day."

But deep down, he began to become troubled. Something was definitely wrong. The way Goku was gasping for breath and clutching at his chest…it was not normal.

"I'm *trying*… " Goku coughed, barely managing to get to his feet. He couldn't take it much more. He could feel something building up inside his chest, a painful tightness and pressure. It was getting harder and harder to fight it, and he was starting to feel lightheaded.

His vision was blurry, and his thoughts were jumbled. He tried to take a step forward, but his legs gave out beneath him, and he once again collapsed to his knees on the ground.

Vegeta's frown deepened as he watched him. He hadn't seen him like this before except back when he had the heart virus.

He took a step closer to Goku, lowering his voice. "The hell you are. Whatever's wrong, you're going to tell me. *Right now*."

Goku tried to shake his head again, but the pain was too intense. He clutched at his chest, his fingers digging into the fabric of his gi. It felt like something was clawing at his lungs.

But as Goku felt a hand against his shoulder, just the barest touch, as fleeting as a breath, his breathing began to regulate as the pain in his chest slowly faded away, replaced by a warm and comforting sensation that washed over him. It had seemed to alleviate his pain, if only for a few moments.

And that's when he realized it - Vegeta was touching him.

"I asked what's going on with you?" He repeated gruffly, his voice betraying a hint of concern despite trying to maintain his usual tough demeanor. "And don't give me some bullshit excuse. Are you sick?"

"I… I don't know." Goku didn't meet his gaze, still too weak to move much. Was Vegeta worried about him? He couldn't believe it. But it's not like it mattered. "My chest… It's been hurting a lot lately, but I think it's feeling a bit better now."

Vegeta scowled as he listened to Goku's words. He could hear the pain and exhaustion in his voice, but he knew the other saiyan was trying to remain strong. It was annoyingly stubborn, but also undeniably admirable.

He hated seeing Goku like this, and the realization of that fact made him feel a little uneasy. He had never been one to feel worry or concern for anyone before, but somehow, seeing Goku like this was bothering him.

"How long has this been going on?" He asked, his voice surprisingly soft.

"Several months now, I think... But it's usually not this bad." Goku admitted pulling his hand away from his chest as the pain subsided.

" *Several months* ?" Vegeta was stunned by that revelation. He let out a frustrated sigh, crossing his arms as he studied Goku carefully. "Why didn't you say anything?"

Goku tried to ignore the pain in his chest that returned when Vegeta pulled his hand away, but didn't protest. "I didn't want to bother you. And besides, like I said before, it's usually not this bad. I can handle it."

Vegeta huffed in irritation. "...You really are an idiot, you know that?"

He had meant it as an insult, but the words came out with more emotion than he had intended.

He paused for a moment, contemplating what to say next. He could see the pain etched on Goku's face, and it was pissing him off. *Why was he getting so worked up over this?*

But before he could say anything else, Goku spoke up suddenly.

"Your touch... It made the pain go away," he said quietly, his voice a fraction above a whisper.

"What?" For a brief moment, Vegeta's eyes widened as if he was having a hard time processing what Goku said, but it wasn't long before his usual cold demeanor returned.

"Don't be idiotic. My touch didn't do anything. You're just imagining things."

Goku felt a stinging sensation in his chest as he heard Vegeta's denial. It hurt more than he wanted to admit, but he smiled in spite of that. "Yeah, you're probably right..."

Vegeta bristled at this response. He knew Goku was trying to play nonchalant and cool, but he could see the flicker of disappointment in his eyes.

It bothered him, and he couldn't understand why. He shouldn't care about whether he hurt Goku's feelings or not. It didn't matter.

"Of course I'm right." He said coolly. "You're just being ridiculous, as usual."

There was a moment of silence as Vegeta averted his gaze, unable to look at Goku directly. He could feel a strange tightness in his chest, but he ignored it. It was just anger, that's all.

"You should probably go see a doctor or something," he said gruffly. "If your chest is hurting that badly, ignoring it won't make it better."

"Mn... Okay..." Goku tried to ignore the familiar pain creeping up on him again.

"We'll spar again later. I'm going home." Vegeta said simply.

"What? Already? But it's only been an *hour* ." Goku said, in a weaker voice than intended. Vegeta hardly even sparred with him much to *begin* with anymore. He could tolerate his feelings not being returned, on at least some level, but this was something else. All of a sudden his chest burned.

"Yeah, well, I have more important things to do than babysitting *you* all day," Vegeta snapped back, still walking away. "I've already wasted enough time as it is."

Goku's face fell further, but he didn't protest. The comment actually hurt a bit more than Goku wanted to admit.

Wasting time? Is that really how he feels about me…? I actually like being around him, though…

He knew there was no point arguing with Vegeta when he was in one of these moods. Besides, he was too distracted by the sharp pain in his chest to think straight.

"Oh. Right." He gnawed at the inside of his cheek, swallowing the lump forming in his throat as he tried his best to play it off with a smile. "I guess I'll see you later, then. Tomorrow maybe?"

"Yeah, fine." Vegeta said flippantly, not even bothering to turn around as he continued walking. "Actually, tomorrow might not work out, after all… Trunks has a field day at school tomorrow and Bulma needs me to go with him."

"Ah…" Goku wanted to ask him if he could do it after school, but it seemed Vegeta didn't want to mess with it. "Okay… Is there… maybe another day we could train instead, then?"

He knew he was probably becoming annoying, but this was important to him.

"I don't know..." Vegeta dismissed with a shrug, still not looking back at Goku. "I have a lot of stuff going on right now. My schedule is pretty packed. Besides, I'm sure you can find someone else to spar with. It's not like you need me specifically, right?"

Goku's heart sank further as he heard Vegeta's words.

"N-No… I guess not… I guess I could spar with somebody like Krillin or something," He tried to sound nonchalant, as if it didn't matter to him at all, but he couldn't hide the

disappointment and sadness in his voice.

"Yeah, whatever. Later," Vegeta replied, his tone cold and dismissive, before he finally blasted off into the sky.

Goku was left on his knees, watching Vegeta fly off into the distance. He couldn't help but once again wonder if Vegeta was purposefully keeping their meetings to a bare minimum and then saying he was busy so he wouldn't have to deal with him again for a while. Of course Goku was no expert, so he couldn't be sure. He wanted more than anything to believe that Vegeta wouldn't do that to him.

He didn't need him to return his feelings, but to practically be pushed to the side like this by somebody he admired was something else.

It actually hurt.

I'm starting to wonder if Vegeta hates me or something…

Sure, I know he can't be with me all the time or anything, but still… This is the first time in the past couple weeks that he's actually been willing to spar with me…

Did I do something to make him mad at me?

Why is my chest hurting so bad today?

The pain in his chest had returned with a vengeance, and he could hardly even breathe. Everything ached, and he felt weaker than ever before.

He leaned against a nearby tree, trying to steady himself. But suddenly, the pain in his chest intensified, and he began to cough violently.

He doubled over, gasping for air.

The coughs were deep and painful, as if he was choking on something. And then, as suddenly as the coughing fit had begun, something flew onto the ground with a soft plop.

Goku wiped at his mouth as the coughing spell subsided, staring down at the object that had fallen from his lips.

He picked it up with a tinge of confusion.

Is this a… flower petal…? But how? Why am I coughing up flowers…? Was it from something I ate?

He had no idea where it had come from or why he had coughed it up, but something deep down told him it wasn't a good sign.

He looked at it closely. It was a vibrant shade of purple, with a velvety texture.

He tried to remember if he had eaten or drunk anything that resembled this petal, but nothing came to mind.

Suddenly, the pain in his chest flared up again, and he began to cough once more.

This time, multiple flower petals flew out of his mouth, joining the first.

Goku gasped, his hands trembling as he stared down at the petals on the ground. There were more this time, each one just as beautiful as the last.

But the sight of them also filled him with dread.

What's happening to me?

As he stood there, coughing and disoriented, the realization slowly crept in. This wasn't normal, something was very wrong.

Goku clutched at his chest, the pain growing stronger with each cough. More petals spilled forth in a whirlwind of purple, dancing on the breeze before landing amongst the others on the ground.

He collapsed to his knees, tears streaming down his face as he retched and convulsed, unable to stop the flow of petals. They continued to spill from his mouth, a never-ending torrent of purple.

Until finally, some of the pain came to a halt. Even if it was only temporary, Goku couldn't have been more grateful for it.

He sat there on the ground, panting and coughing intermittently, staring at the carpet of purple petals surrounding him.

With the pain lessening, he finally had the chance to think clearly. But the only thought running through his mind was one question.

What the hell was going on?

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END CHAPTER 1…

Chapter 2

Story: A Heart's Bloom, Chapter 2

A/N: Wahh thank you so so much for the kudos and comments. I'm so happy people are enjoying this, I hope y'all will stick with me to the end. :333

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Several weeks had passed.

Goku sat at the dinner table with Chichi and Goten. They were eating a delicious meal, but Goku's appetite was next to non-existent.

He absentmindedly picked at the food on his plate, his stomach in knots. His body ached, and he felt weak and exhausted.

As he pushed the food around, he checked his phone for what must have been the millionth time, his fingers hovering over the most recent conversation thread with Vegeta.

| Goku: Yo, Vegeta, you up for a little sparring today? *(Sent On October 3rd, 4:46 PM)*

| Vegeta: Not now. I'm busy. You'll have to find somebody else. *(Received On October 4th, 2:03 PM)*

| Goku: Oh, alright, how about tomorrow then? *(Sent on October 4th, 2:04 PM)*

| Vegeta: I told you I'm busy. Go train with King Kai or something. *(Received On October 4th, 9:27 PM)*

| Goku: Aw, but King Kai has been in a grouchy mood lately because of his halo and Krillin won't have another vacation for months. You're all I've got. Come on, please? Train with me. *(Sent on October 4th, 9:29 PM)*

| Vegeta: I said no and I meant it. Now leave me alone already before I block you. *(Received on October 5th, 11:42 AM)*

| Goku: You wouldn't do that to me, would you? *(Sent on October 5th, 11:51 AM)*

| Vegeta: Try me. *(Received on October 6th, 4:58 PM)*

| Goku: You're so mean!!!! 😾 (Sent on October 6th, 4:59 PM)

| Vegeta: And you're annoying. *(Received on October 6th, 5:03 PM)*

| Goku: Come on, I just want someone to spar with. *(Sent on October 6th, 5:07 PM)*

| Vegeta: Go train on your own then. *(Received on October 7th, at 6:36 PM)*

| Goku: But it's more fun with a sparring partner. *(Seen on October 7th, 6:42 PM)*

| Goku: Pretty please? *(Seen on October 7th, 6:43 PM)*

| Goku: Can you come spar tomorrow? *(Seen on October 8th, 5:24 AM)*

| Goku: When will you be free to train again? *(Seen on October 10th, 3:21 PM)*

| Goku: Hey, look, it's cool if you've got stuff to do, but you could at least try to keep me updated. *(Delivered on October 26th, 3:21 PM)*

It was strange getting no responses from Vegeta. He knew he could be a bit of a recluse, but it had never been this long without *some* sort of reply.

Goku had seen the messages being read, but no words ever came back. He had tried everything to get Vegeta to spar with him, even resorting to begging. But clearly, nothing was working. It was as if Vegeta had completely shut him out.

Feeling the familiar sensation rising in the back of his throat, he let out a frustrated sigh, putting his phone down on the table with a little more force than necessary.

"Everything alright, Goku?" Chichi had stopped eating and was looking at him with slight concern in her eyes. "You've barely touched your food."

Goku forced a smile, trying to act nonchalant. "Oh, uh, Yeah, I'm okay. Just not feeling all that hungry right now, that's all."

He gave an awkward chuckle, hoping that would satisfy her inquisitiveness. He didn't want to worry her anymore than he already had.

Chichi hummed in mild disbelief but didn't press any further. She could tell there was something amiss, but she knew Goku well enough to know he wouldn't spill his thoughts easily.

Instead, she just nodded. "Alright, but at least drink try to something. You'll get dehydrated."

"Yeah, I will," Goku agreed, knowing he couldn't argue with her logic.

He picked up his glass and took a few sips, the water helping to alleviate his dry throat. But as he sipped at the water, he felt the familiar scratching sensation in his throat again. He tried to ignore it, but the aching only seemed to worsen. The water felt like sandpaper on his raw throat, making him grimace in discomfort.

Chichi noticed his grimace, her concern growing. "Goku, are you sure you're feeling alright? You look like you're in pain…"

Goku immediately shook his head. The last thing he needed was her worrying about him even more.

"Oh, uh, something got stuck in my throat, but it's all gone now." He stood up, grabbing his phone. "...Hey, listen, I think I'm gonna go out and do some work on the farm for a little while. I need to clear my head a bit. I'll be back later. "

Chichi watched him go, still not fully convinced, but deciding to give him some space.

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Goku hurried out of the house, his steps quick and rushed. Once he was outside, he let out a sigh and leaned against the wall, taking a moment to just breathe, the air filling his lungs and offering a brief moment of respite from the pain. But as he inhaled, a sharp pain shot through his chest and his throat constricted.

A coughing fit was building, and he knew it wouldn't be long before the flowers returned.

Goku stumbled some ways away from the house, trying to find a secluded spot before the coughing started again. He doubled over, his body heaving with violent coughs as the disease took over.

He could practically feel the flowers wriggling up his throat, ready to be expelled once more.

He collapsed to his knees, the grass and dirt around him becoming speckled with a sea of purple as he coughed up petal after petal, a few whole flowers mixed in this time.

Each cough was like a stabbing pain in his throat and chest, making it hard to breathe. He gasped and wheezed for air, his eyes tearing up from the exertion. When the coughing eventually subsided, he was left trembling and drained.

He looked down at the pile of flowers around him, their silky petals mockingly beautiful. They seemed to whisper a constant reminder that the disease was still taking its toll on his body.

He leaned back against the trunk of a tree, closing his eyes for only a moment. Taking a deep breath, he finally pushed himself back upright. His chest still ached, but the urge to cough had subsided for now.

He glanced around to make sure no one had seen him. The last thing he needed was to worry Chichi even more.

With grim determination, he began making his way toward the fields. Work would help take his mind off things.

He reached the edge of the fields and began trudging through the soft earth. The familiar scent of turned soil and the hum of insects filled the air, providing a sense of routine that usually calmed him.

But today, even the serenity of the farm couldn't fully soothe the unease in his heart.

He picked up a hoe and set to work weeding a row of broccoli. It was monotonous, physical labor, which usually was enough to focus his mind and drive away thoughts of anything else.

But as he worked, the memory of Vegeta's conversation thread with him and the flowers he'd just coughed up was like a persistent buzzing in the back of his mind.

The sun beat down on him as he labored on. Sweat dripped from his brow, stinging his eyes, but he barely noticed. Every pull of a weed, every turn of the soil was automatic, his body going through the motions while his mind was somewhere else entirely.

With each pull of a weed, the ache in his chest seemed to pulse a little harder. He tried to ignore it, focusing all his effort on simply doing the work. He couldn't let himself stop, not now.

The work kept him occupied, and gave him a momentary distraction. But as the hours passed, his energy began to dwindle.

Each movement became a little more strained, each step a little more labored. He tried to push past the weariness, to keep going for just a little longer.

But his body could only do so much, and he found himself having to stop to catch his breath more frequently.

It wasn't long before the sun was sinking lower on the horizon, painting the sky in shades of orange and purple. The light was fading, making it harder to see the crops and weeds.

Goku glanced up at the darkening sky. He knew he should probably call it a day and head back to the house soon, but he was reluctant to stop. The quiet solitude and the toil of farm work was the only thing grounding him right now.

Until all of a sudden, Goku heard the familiar chime from his phone, pulling him from his thoughts. He took it out and checked the screen, his heart skipping a beat as he saw the sender.

Vegeta.

Without thinking, he immediately tapped on the notification to view the message.

| Vegeta: You really need to stop sending me so many messages. I told you it's annoying. I'll message you when I'm ready. Besides, the last time I saw you, you could barely stand up. If you aren't capable of fighting at your full power, then what's the point? *(Received on October 27th, 6:08 PM)*

Goku frowned as he read the words. Vegeta's cold and dismissive tone stung, especially after having been ignored for so long.

He felt a lump forming in his throat, running a shaky hand through his messy hair.

"What's the point, huh?" he muttered to himself. "It's not always about fighting, ya know?"

Stupid Vegeta...

Trying to keep his emotions in check, he clicked his phone off and jammed it back into his pocket, feeling the anger and exhaustion bubbling up inside him.

He tried to turn his attention back to weeding the farm, his motions hard and agitated as he tore at the stubborn weeds. Each pull was like a release valve for the frustration and pain welling up inside him.

The ache in his chest and throat grew more pronounced, the pain exacerbated by the emotions raging in his heart.

He paused for a moment, taking a deep breath to try and clear his head. But it didn't help. The lump in his throat only seemed to tighten.

The sky was reaching nightfall, but Goku barely noticed. He was in his own little world now, caught between the pain, the anger, and the overwhelming loneliness.

With one final, vicious pull of a weed, Goku's body was wracked with another coughing fit. His condition had pounced at the sudden spike in emotion, forcing out less petals and more flowers this time.

They were bloody and bitter, staining his hands and leaving a metallic taste in his mouth.

I'm bleeding… This can't be happening…

He couldn't breathe, he couldn't think, all he could do was cough and cough, the cycle seemingly endless.

The pain was a hot lance through his chest, making his vision swim and his knees buckle. He dropped the weeding tool and fell to his knees, clutching at his throat in desperation.

The coughing tore at him like razors. He tried to force air into his lungs, but it was a constant struggle, his vision going dark around the edges, as whatever this virus was had its way with him.

The coughing slowly subsided, but the pain and breathlessness remained. Blood trickled from the corners of his mouth, and his throat felt raw and tender.

He sat there for a long moment, gasping and trying to catch his breath. The ground beneath him was cold and wet, his clothes and hands stained red.

All of a sudden, Goku's head snapped up as he heard a soft frightened voice break the silence.

"Dad...?"

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A/N: I'm just trying to get past the build up. I'll bring Vegeta back in a couple chapters!!! :DDD

Chapter 3

Story: A Heart's Bloom, Chapter 3.

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Goku's head snapped around as he heard a soft voice break the silence

He looked up and saw Goten standing a few feet away, a small, trembling figure silhouetted against the descending sun.

Goten’s eyes were wide with worry as he took in his father’s predicament. He was holding a furoshiki filled with bento boxes. No doubt Chichi had sent him here.

"G-Goten…" Goku choked out, his voice rough and hoarse. He hadn’t heard his son approach. How long had the boy been standing there? How much had he seen?

Goten hesitated, unsure of how to proceed. He could see the blood on Goku's clothes, the petals scattered around him, and the look of pain and exhaustion etched on his father's face.

A part of him wanted to run away, to pretend he hadn't seen any of this.

But another part, a stronger part, pushed him forward. He dropped the furoshiki, unconcerned with the bento boxes spilling out onto the ground as he approached his father.

"What's wrong, Dad? Why were you coughing up flowers…?" Goten took a hesitant step closer, his gaze flickering briefly to the blood staining Goku's clothes.

"...Goten, I..." Goku's voice was gruff and strained, the words scraping against his raw throat. He struggled to find the right words, the right explanations. He didn't have the energy to come up with a believable lie, but if he couldn't even begin to *explain* to himself what was happening, how was he supposed to make his son understand it?

"I need you… to listen to me… I'm…" Reaching out, he shakily touched the side of Goten's cheek in an attempt to wipe away some of the tears that were falling. But then he pulled back when he realized he was smearing blood on him. "Your daddy's sick. Really sick. And I don't know what's causing it, exactly, but it's... it's been making me cough up things like that."

He gestured to the petals and blood scattered around him.

Goten's eyes widened further, his small frame tensing in surprise.

"You're...sick?" he repeated, the word sounding like a curse in his mouth.

"Y-yeah..." Goku forced a weak smile, but it faltered beneath the weight of his own helplessness, as he tried to sound reassuring. He rubbed a hand against his shoulder, forcing a smile. "But hey, look, it's nothing for you to worry about, okay…? I just *know* it'll pass soon..."

"Are you sure…?" Goten swallowed hard, his small face pinched with worry. He looked like he wanted to argue, to demand answers that Goku simply didn't have. The sight of his usually cheerful son looking so frightened was heartbreaking. He never wanted his children to see him like this.

"Yeah, I-" The conversation was cut abruptly short as another coughing fit started to bubble up in Goku's chest. He doubled over, his body shuddering with the force of the retching.

The metallic taste of blood soon filled his mouth, mixing with the acrid flavor of the petals. This time it was worse than the previous fit, the pain sharper and more intense, each cough feeling like it was tearing his throat apart.

Through the veil of pain and the ringing in his ears, he heard Goten let out a gasp. The boy was standing there, frozen with fearful disbelief.

As the coughing continued, Goku heard a sniffle followed by a small voice.

"D-dad..."

He managed to look up from the ground, the pain momentarily forgotten in his surprise. Goten had taken a step closer and was now wrapping his small arms around Goku's body, holding onto him like a lifeline.

"I'm… I'm gonna fly you back home to mom," Goten said, his voice shaking but determined. "You're hurt and... and you need her help."

Goku shook his head weakly, trying to protest. "No... no, I'm fine. You don't have to-"

Another coughing fit cut off his words, the petals and blood spilling from his lips. He tasted iron and bitterness, the world spinning around him as oxygen escaped his lungs.

"No, you're not fine!" Goten cried, tears running down his cheeks. "You're hurt and bleeding! You need help!"

His small hands gripped Goku's clothes, his body trembling against him.

Goku wanted to argue, to tell his son that everything was okay and he could handle this himself. But the words wouldn't come, his throat and mouth clogged with the aftereffects of his coughing fit.

He was too weak, too tired to full process the feeling of his son lifting him up.

The flight back home was a blur of sensations. There was the cool evening air against his skin, the sound of Goten's strained breaths as he struggled to support Goku's weight, the distant lights of the house getting closer.

But the pain and exhaustion dulled his senses, making everything feel like a dream.

After sitting him down next to the door, Goten hovered just beside him, covered in blood, his face tear-streaked and filled with worry. He was panting from the exertion of flying with Goku, his breath coming in short gasps.

"J-just stay right here," he said quietly, the small command a stark contrast to the usual cheerful tone. "I'm gonna go get Mom."

Goku wanted to argue, to say that he could handle this himself. But he could barely find the strength to nod. His body felt like it was made of stone, the exhaustion and pain overwhelming his usually indomitable will.

He heard Goten's soft footsteps recede into the house, the sound of his voice calling out for Chichi ringing through the air.

Goku closed his eyes, letting out a pained breath. The cool night air against his skin and the soft sound of crickets filling the silence.

The wait was agony. Each second felt like an hour, each passing moment filled with the pain, the exhaustion, and the overwhelming sense of helplessness.

Goku tried to keep his breathing steady, his mind too weary to focus on something other than the ache in his chest and throat.

He could hear whispers and soft footsteps coming from the house, hushed voices carrying through the open door. They sounded tense, worried... and he could hear the fear in Chichi's voice above the others.

Before his mind could linger on the voices long enough to make out the words, the door slid open with a rattle.

Chichi stepped outside, her face paler than usual. Her eyes flickered with worry as she looked down at him, her movements quick and efficient as she knelt down beside him.

"You idiot," she muttered, her voice shaking. "Why didn't you tell me you were sick? Look at you, you're a mess."

She ran her fingers through his hair gently, her touch a mix of affection and worry. Goku tried to speak, to reassure her, but another cough caught in his throat.

Chichi's eyes widened in alarm as the cough wracked through him, petals and blood spilling from his lips. She was quick to act, leaning him forward and gently patting his back.

"Shhh, just breathe," she whispered, her voice tight with worry. "Just do your best to breathe."

Goku could feel Chichi's presence like a lifeline. He focused on the sound of her voice and the feel of her hand against his back, using it as an anchor as he rode out the coughing fit.

Slowly, it finally subsided, leaving Goku slumped against Chichi, his body weak and trembling. Despite her comfort, a small part of him could not help but yearn for another presence.

His mind kept going back to Vegeta, the words of the earlier text echoing in his mind.

The memory of their previous interactions haunted him, the cold, detached tone of Vegeta's messages like another dagger in his chest. He wanted to push aside the thoughts, to focus on the comfort Chichi was trying to provide.

Chichi was speaking, her voice soft and soothing, but he only caught fragments of her words. Something about taking him to a hospital, which he instinctively protested to.

"No, no hospital. I can't-" He immediately became strangled, as the inevitable happened once more.

Sensing his panic, Chichi then said something else. Something about needing to get him inside and clean him up.

He heard the pain and worry in her voice, the fear for his safety. It only made him feel more guilty. He knew he should reassure her, to tell her he would be okay.

But the lie stuck in his throat, refusing to come out.

As Chichi helped him to his feet, his legs trembled like a newborn fawn. His body felt heavy, weaker than it had ever been.

The short walk back into the house felt like a marathon, each step sending pain and dizziness spinning through him.

Chichi led him straight to the bathroom, her arm around his waist to support him. The cool tile felt stark against his heated skin, a jarring contrast to the pain that still ached in his chest and throat.

She settled him down on the edge of the bathtub, her expression stern but her touch gentle. Chichi's eyes flickered briefly to the petals and blood staining his clothes, and he could see the worry and fear there.

She began to unbutton his shirt, her movements efficient and practiced. Despite their divorce, she still knew how to care for him better than anyone else. There was a familiarity in her touch that went beyond marriage, a bond forged out of years of shared history and understanding.

Goku let her undress him without protest, his body too weakened to protest. He leaned against the cool edge of the tub, his mind still swimming in pain.

Chichi tossed his ruined shirt into a nearby hamper, her expression never leaving his face. Her eyes scanned over his body for a moment, taking in the sweat and pallor of his skin, the trembling muscles and rapid breathing.

Chichi knelt down beside him, her hands moving to unbuckle his pants. She was gentle as she removed them, her touch never lingering in any one place for too long. Despite the situation, he couldn't help the small shiver that ran through him as the cool air hit his bare legs.

Chichi grabbed a cloth nearby and began to clean the blood and sweat from his skin. Her gaze was focused, her movements efficient. But he could see the concern in her eyes as she cleaned him, the worry etched in every line of her face.

As she worked, Goku tried to focus on her and the sensation of the cloth gliding across his skin. But his mind kept drifting back to Vegeta, the thoughts of the Saiyan and the unknown disease swirling in his head like a dark storm.

Chichi finished cleaning the blood from his skin, tossing the cloth into the hamper with the stained shirt. She looked over him for a moment, her eyes taking in the paleness of his skin and the way he was slumped against the tub.

She gently patted his shoulder, her touch like a small comfort amidst the chaos of his thoughts.

"Stay here," she said quietly, her voice breaking through the silence. "I'm going to get you some clean clothes."

Goku nodded silently, unable to find the words to speak. His throat felt raw and sore, each breath sending a sharp pain through his chest.

Chichi left the room silently, her footsteps soft against the tiled floor. Goku was left alone, the silence of the bathroom like a vacuum of sound. He could hear his own breathing, ragged and labored, the only noise in the eerily quiet room.

In the solitude, his mind started to wander once again. He thought of Vegeta, the cold text messages seared into his mind. He wanted to understand why Vegeta had been avoiding him, why the other Saiyan never had time for him anymore. The pain in his chest and throat felt like a physical reflection of the pain in his heart.

He closed his eyes, trying to will the thoughts away. But the memories played like a broken record in his head, the echoes of past conversations haunting him. The pain in his chest and throat felt like a physical manifestation of the heartache he'd been feeling.

The sound of Chichi returning with a fresh change of clothes snapped him back to reality.

She set them down nearby, her eyes taking in his slumped form.

"Here, let's get you dressed," she said, her voice soft but firm. She picked up the top from the pile of clothes and helped him put it on, her touch gentle but efficient.

Goku let her dress him, his body feeling heavy and uncooperative. Each movement sent a spike of pain through his chest and throat, the exhaustion and the sickness making it feel like he was moving through thick syrup.

Chichi carefully buttoned the shirt, before moving to his pants. He helped her as best as he could, his movements slow and clumsy compared to her efficiency. Each inch felt like a mile,

his body so weak and tired it was all he could do just to sit upright.

When he was finally dressed, Chichi stepped back, her hands on her hips. She looked him over once more, her eyes taking in every detail of his exhausted form. Despite her worry, there was a hint of resignation in her expression, a knowledge that he was stubborn and headstrong.

She took a deep breath, her hands dropping to her sides. "You're staying here tonight," she said firmly, her voice leaving no room for argument. "You need rest and I'm not letting you go anywhere until you're better."

Goku wanted to protest, to tell her he could take care of himself. But his throat was raw and painful, each breath making him want to cough. And the expression on her face told him she was not going to accept any arguments.

So he nodded, swallowing back the protest that was on the tip of his tongue. The thought of fighting with her over this made him even more tired than he felt already.

Chichi helped him walk down the hallway to the bedroom, her presence a steady and reassuring force beside him. As they walked, she spoke up again, her voice soft but firm.

"Are you hungry? I sent Goten with several bento boxes earlier, but I wasn't sure if you had eaten any of it." She asked, her gaze flickering to his face.

Goku felt guilty at the mention of the bento boxes, remembering that Goten had dropped them, but his stomach churned at the thought of food.

He knew he *should* feel hungry – he hadn't eaten much of anything all day – but the thought of stuffing something down his already sore throat was repulsive.

He shook his head silently, not trusting himself to speak.

Chichi seemed to understand his response, her eyes narrowing slightly as she took in his reaction. She didn't seem surprised by his lack of appetite, but there was a hint of worry in her expression.

"You should still try to eat something," she said, her voice gentle but firm. "Even if it's just a few bites. You need your strength to fight off whatever this is."

"It hurts too much to swallow... cuz of how much I've been coughing… The flowers…" Goku looked away. He hated worrying her, but he couldn't help it.

Chichi's expression softened, a hint of understanding in her eyes.

"I know…," she said softly, her voice filled with empathy. "But you still need something on your stomach, even if it's just something small. Maybe… maybe I can find something else that will be easier on your throat? Some soup?"

Goku could only nod silently in response, the thought of eating anything making his stomach turn. No matter how much he wanted to avoid it, he knew Chichi was right.

Chichi gently guided him further into the bedroom, helping him sit down on the edge of the bed. She gave him a final reassuring pat on the shoulder before stepping back.

"Alright, just rest," she said quietly. "I'll go make something for you to eat."

Goku nodded silently as she left, lying back onto the pillows with a huff of pain and exhaustion. His closed his eyes, trying to find some comfort in the familiar scent of the bedding. Chichi always made sure everything in the house was clean, looking after and replacing his bedding when it got dirty.

It was nice.

The minutes ticked by slowly, each one feeling like an hour, but at long last, a knock on his bedroom door interrupted his thoughts.

"Goku? Honey, I've got something for you. Do you mind if I come in?" Chichi's concerned voice came from the other side of the door.

"Y-yeah..." He managed to croak out, wincing as the words scraped against his raw throat.

The door opened slowly, Chichi's footsteps padding across the room. He forced himself to open his eyes, offering a small smile onto his face when he saw her.

Chichi was carrying a bowl of soup in her hand, the steam wafting up from the hot liquid as she sat down on the edge of the bed next to him.

"How are you feeling?" She murmured, her voice soft.

"I'm fine, just tired..." Goku murmured, his voice weak and raspy.

She didn't seem convinced by his response, but she didn't push the matter. "I made one of your favorites, miso soup. It's light and easy on the stomach and I also added some ginger to help soothe your throat."

He could smell it in the soup, the sharp, spicy scent slightly overriding the scent of the miso. It didn't make him want to gag quite as badly as the miso soup alone, but the thought of eating anything still made him feel nauseous. He knew she was trying to help. "Thanks, Chichi…"

"Of course," She replied softly, her hand reaching out to gently rest on his forehead. She was checking his temperature, although he didn't feel hot to the touch. Her touch was a gentle

comfort, grounding him in the midst of his pain and exhaustion.

"You still feel a bit clammy," she said, her voice barely above a murmur. She let her hand linger on his forehead a moment longer before pulling it back. "I wish you had told me how bad it was before."

He closed his eyes again, not replying. He knew she was right, he should have told her sooner. Maybe if he had, it would have prevented everything from getting this bad. But he'd been stubborn, trying to deal with it on his own, and now he was paying the price.

She didn't push the matter, knowing him well enough to know it would be useless. Instead, she picked up the bowl of soup again and held it out to him.

"Here, sit up for me. You need to eat something," she said quietly. "It doesn't have to be a lot. Just a few spoonfuls."

Chichi brought the spoon to his lips, the warm liquid of the soup coating his tongue. The taste was strong, the ginger almost overpowering the miso. Each spoonful was a struggle. He felt as if he was forcing the soup down, the effort leaving him even more exhausted. But Chichi continued to feed him, her other hand providing a gentle pressure on the back of his neck to help keep him sitting upright.

As Chichi continued to feed him, the sound of footsteps padded down the hallway towards the bedroom. The door creaked open slowly, revealing Goten's small frame. The young boy's face was troubled, his eyes filled with worry.

He had changed clothes since earlier, probably because of the blood that Goku had gotten on him.

"Is...is Dad gonna be alright?" Goten's voice was small and shaky, the sight of his father so weak and unwell clearly troubling him deeply.

Chichi looked up from feeding Goku, her expression softening as she looked at Goten. She tried to give him a reassuring smile, but it didn't quite reach her eyes.

"He's going to be fine, sweetie," she said, her voice soft. "He's just not feeling very well right now."

Goten nodded, but he didn't look any less worried. He shifted from foot to foot, his bottom lip still quivering. "Can I… Can I stay here with him?" he asked quietly.

Chichi's expression softened further, and she placed a hand on Goten's shoulder.

"Of course, sweetie," she said, her voice gentle. "I think your father would like that. Just… Just don't stay up too late, okay? You have school tomorrow."

Goten nodded again, his expression brightening slightly at her words.

"Okay," he said. He moved around to the other side of the bed, climbing up onto the mattress beside Goku.

Goku watched him with a mixture of fondness and exhaustion as Goten settled himself next to him. The young boy snuggled close, his small body pressing up against Goku's side. Despite his exhaustion, Goku managed to lift his arm and rest it around Goten's shoulders, pulling him closer.

Chichi watched the exchange with a small smile, her eyes softening further at the sight of father and son snuggled up together.

"You two get some rest now," she said quietly. "I'll be just down the hall if you need me."

Goku nodded in response, shifting a bit to get more comfortable. With Goten snuggled against him and Chichi's presence providing comfort and reassurance, he felt a small bit of

tension ease from his body.

Chichi left the room after giving them both one last small smile, closing the door quietly behind her. Goku and Goten were left alone in the room, the silence broken only by their breathing and the occasional shuffling of bed sheets.

Goten snuggled closer to Goku's side, his small hand resting on his chest. He could feel the steady beating of his father's heart under his fingers, a comforting reminder that despite how sick he looked, he was still alive.

"Hey, Dad?" Goten's voice cut through the silence, small and uncertain. "Are you really gonna be okay? Like, for real this time?"

Goku looked down at his son, seeing the worry and fear in his eyes. He forced a smile, lifting his hand to ruffled Goten's hair.

"Of course, I will," he said, his voice still weak and scratchy. "I might be down for a bit, but I'll get better soon. Don't worry about me, okay?"

Goten nodded, but he didn't look convinced. He was silent for a few moments, before his small voice spoke up again.

"When you were coughing up flowers earlier, it was kind of scary," he admitted. "I didn't know that could happen."

Goku's smile faltered, a pang of guilt going through him at the fear in his son's voice and knowing that he was the cause of it.

He hadn't wanted to scare Goten, but he hadn't been able to stop the coughing fit.

"Yeah, I hear what you mean…" Goku's expression tightened, his mind racing. He wanted to reassure his son, but he didn't know how to do that when he didn't have an answer himself. He laughed, trying to play it off as a joke. "To tell you the truth, I actually didn't know myself. I'm not sure why this is happening."

Goten was silent for a few moments, his small fingers fiddling with the bed sheets. His expression was contemplative, as if he was trying to come up with a solution to this problem. And then, his small voice spoke up again. "Maybe you could ask Ms. Bulma. She's really smart, right? Maybe she would know something."

Goku blinked in surprise, not having expected his son to suggest that. But he supposed the suggestion made sense. Bulma was one of the smartest people he knew. If anyone was likely to have some insight on this weird illness, it was her.

"You think...?" he said slowly, mulling over the suggestion. "I guess I could ask her... That's actually not a bad idea... Thanks, Goten."

Goten smiled, looking pleased that he'd been able to offer a solution. But then his expression became worried again.

"But..." he said, his voice very small. "What if Ms. Bulma *doesn't* know… what are you gonna do then?"

Goku's heart ached at the worry in his son's voice. He wanted so badly to reassuring him, to tell him everything would be okay. But he also didn't want to lie to him, not about something this serious.

"Hmm… I haven't really thought that far ahead yet. But I'll figure something out. I'll find a way to get better, no matter what it takes."

Goten bit his lip, and snuggled closer to Goku's side, his small body pressing against his father's.

"You promise?" he asked, his voice barely above a whisper.

Goku wrapped his arm around his son tighter, pulling him close.

"I promise," he said, his voice as firm and resolute as he could make it. "I'll get better, for both you and for your mom. I'm not going anywhere."

Goten let out a small sigh of relief, his body relaxing just a bit at his father's words. For now, he seemed satisfied with the answer. He snuggled closer, his head resting on his father's chest, right above his heart. "Goodnight, Dad."

"Goodnight, son." Goku kept his arm around Goten, holding his son close as the young boy's steady breathing provided a small measure of comfort.

Despite the pain and the exhaustion, Goku found his mind drifting away from all the questions and confusion. For now, he just wanted to rest, to have this moment with his son. Tomorrow, he would ask Bulma for help. But for now, he just wanted to rest his eyes…

Slowly, sleep claimed him, his body relaxing and his breathing deepening as exhaustion won out. The last sound he heard before he dropped into unconsciousness was the soft, steady breathing of the young child against him, and the quiet rhythm of his own heartbeat in his ears.

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END OF CHAPTER 3

Chapter 4

Story: A Heart's Bloom , ***Chapter 4***

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When Goku woke up, his body felt heavy. It took him a moment to remember what had happened, but as soon as the memories came back, he let out a soft groan, the events of the previous day replaying through his mind.

He felt a small weight against him, and he looked down to see Goten still asleep, his small body snuggled up against his side. The sight of his son, sleeping peacefully, brought a small smile to Goku's face, despite how lousy he felt.

But he also felt an ache in his bladder, signaling that he needed to get up to use the bathroom. With a slight grimace, he slowly and carefully started to extract himself from his son's grasp.

Goten stirred slightly as his father moved, letting out a small mumble of protest at the movement. But he didn't wake properly, his grip loosening enough that Goku was able to carefully slide out of bed.

He steadied himself against the bedside table as he got to his feet. The room swayed slightly around him, a wave of dizziness washing through him. He grit his teeth against the sensation, waiting for it to pass.

Once the dizziness faded, he forced himself to take a step forward. His legs felt wobbly and uncoordinated, and he had to concentrate hard to keep himself from falling. But he managed to make it to the door of the room without too much difficulty.

He stumbled his way across the hall towards the bathroom, each step an effort in itself. His whole body ached and his limbs felt like lead. But eventually, he managed to reach the

bathroom, practically stumbling inside and closing the door behind him.

Once he'd finished in the bathroom, he slowly made his way out of the bathroom, only to find Chichi waiting for him in the hallway.

Chichi looked at him with concern, taking in his pallor and the way he leaned heavily against the wall. "You look terrible," she said, her voice soft. "Did you get enough sleep?"

Goku gave her a wry smile, leaning heavily on the wall for support.

"Yeah, I slept alright," he said, his voice still rough and scratchy. "But I feel like crap."

"You shouldn't be out of bed," she chastised gently, folding her arms. "You need to rest and let your body recover."

"I know," Goku protested lightly. "But I needed to use the bathroom. Besides, I can't just stay in bed all day. I need to move around a bit.

Chichi shook her head, gently steering him back towards their bedroom.

"You're too stubborn for your own good, you know that…?" she said, a hint of fond exasperation in her voice, before sighing. "But alright. Just promise me you'll take it easy, alright? No overexerting yourself."

Goku nodded, managing a small smile despite his exhaustion. "I promise."

Eventually, they reached the bedroom, and Chichi helped him back into bed. She fussed over him for a few moments, adjusting the blankets and helping him sit up against the pillows. Goku let her without complaint, knowing that she was just trying to take care of him.

Goten who was lying next to Goku, shifted slightly in his sleep.

Chichi's eyes softened as she looked down at Goku and Goten, the two of them side by side on the bed. She reached out and stroked Goten's hair gently, a fond smile on her face.

"You know," she said quietly, "I'm glad Goten's been able to spend so much time with you lately. I think having you around has been good for him."

Goku smiled at her words, his own gaze falling to Goten. "Yeah," he said quietly. "It has been nice having him around. He's a good kid."

Goten shifted again, his small face scrunching up as he started to wake up properly. His eyes blinked open, and he yawned widely, his little body stretching beneath the blankets.

"Morning, buddy," Goku said, his voice still rough. "Time to get up for school."

Goten looked up at him, his sleep-mussed hair falling into his eyes.

"Do I have to...?" he complained, pouting.

Chichi gave him a stern look. "Yes, you do," she said firmly. "You can't skip school just because your dad's a little sick. Now come on, up you go."

"Fine..." Goten let out a small sigh, knowing there was no way he was getting out of school today. He reluctantly sat up in bed, rubbing his eyes and yawning again.

Chichi smiled, ruffling his hair.

"That's my good boy." She said, before turning her attention back to Goku. "I'll get Goten ready. You just stay here and get some rest, okay?"

Goku nodded, sinking back against the pillows. His eyelids were starting to feel heavy again, the strain he had put on his body yesterday from all the coughing starting to catch up to him. "Alright."

Chichi left the room, taking Goten with her. For a few moments, silence fell over the room. Goku watched the door close behind them, the quiet settling around him. He closed his eyes, trying not to focus on the pain and exhaustion. He knew he had to rest, to let his body recover. But his mind was restless, his thoughts swirling around like a tempest. The knowledge that he was sick, the unknown cause of his illness… it was hard to ignore.

The sound of footsteps in the hallway signaled Chichi and Goten's return. Goku opened his eyes as the door opened again, revealing Chichi and Goten, the young boy dressed in his school uniform with his backpack slung over his shoulder.

"Well, Goten's ready for school," Chichi said, allowing Goten to walk over to him. "He just wants to say goodbye to you before he heads out."

Goku looked at Goten, a small smile pulling at his lips.

"Aww, of course he can," he said, holding out his arms. "Come here."

Goten approached the bed eagerly, the prospect of having to go to school momentarily pushed from his mind. He clambered up onto the bed, crawling up beside Goku and snuggling into his side.

Goku put his arm around him, pulling him close. "Be good at school today, alright?" he said, giving Goten a gentle squeeze.

Goten nodded, his small face scrunching up in determination.

"I will," he said, his voice firm.

Goku chuckled slightly, the sight of his son's serious expression making him smile. He ruffled Goten's hair affectionately.

"Good," he said. "And don't cause any trouble for your teacher, okay?"

"I won't, Dad…" Goten protested, looking offended at the very idea that he'd misbehave in school.

Chichi chuckled.

"Alright, Goten," she said. "Let your father get some rest now, okay? We don't want to tire him out too much."

Goten pouted but nodded, turning to give Goku one last hug. "Bye, Dad."

"Bye, son." Goku said, returning the hug. "I'll see you later, okay?"

Goten nodded, a hint of reluctance in his expression. He clearly didn't want to leave his bedridden father, but he was too obedient to protest.

After a few moments, Goten clambered off the bed and Chichi took his hand.

"Alright, come on, you need to head off or you'll be late." Chichi said gently, steering Goten towards the door.

Goten looked back at Goku as he was led out of the room, his small face filled with concern. Goku gave him a reassuring smile, giving him a small wave.

"Hey, don't worry about me," he said. "I'll be fine. You just focus on school."

"Okay..." Goten said quietly, still looking reluctant to leave. But he didn't protest further, allowing Chichi to lead him out of the room and down the hallway.

Once the door closed behind them, the room was silent again. Goku let out a small sigh, his exhausted body sinking deeper into the bed. The simple act of saying goodbye to his son had drained him, the effort it had taken to appear as if everything was okay feeling like a Herculean task.

His eyes slid closed once more, his body feeling as heavy as lead. The silence of the room was almost deafening, the only sounds being his labored breathing and the steady pounding of his heartbeat that he somehow could hear loud and clear.

The pain in his chest hadn’t subsided either, the familiar sharpness still present and now it felt as if there were thorns in his lungs. He winced, shifting slightly in a futile attempt to find a position where the pain might ease a bit.

But it didn’t help. The pain remained, a persistent and uncomfortable reminder of his current condition. Goku let out a hiss of breath through gritted teeth, his hands clenching into tight fists around the bedsheets.

Goku's mind started to wander as he lay there, his thoughts shifting back to his conversation with Goten from the night before. The young boy's words echoed in his mind.

"Maybe you could ask Ms. Bulma. She's really smart, right? Maybe she would know something."

The thought caught his attention, and he began to consider the idea more seriously. Perhaps Goten was right. Maybe Bulma would know something. She was a scientist and had a sharp mind, afterall.

He mulled it over in his head, his mind weighing the pros and cons. On one hand, he didn't want to worry Bulma unnecessarily. On the other hand, he was desperate to find out what was wrong with him. This illness was strange and alarming, and he needed it to stop.

He groaned, his brain going round in circles with indecision.

The pain in his chest flared up again, however, sending a jolt of pain through his body. He jerked reflexively, a hiss of breath escaping through his gritted teeth.

That decided it, he thought. If the pain and illness didn't stop soon, they might kill him. There was nothing left to do but ask for help.

Willing himself to open his eyes, he sat up against the pillows. A wave of dizziness hit him as he shifted, but he fought through it, gritting his teeth against the nausea that threatened to consume him.

He glanced at the bedside table, spotting his phone on its surface. It wasn't out of his reach, but it was hard to grab it with his limbs feeling as heavy as they did.

He grunted, his hand groping for the bedside table. His fingers brushed against the smooth surface, but he couldn't quite reach his phone. He cursed under his breath, his frustration mounting. He was starting to feel like a useless invalid, unable to do something as simple as grab his own damn phone.

He tried again, stretching out his arm as far as he could. He managed to grab the edge of the table, but it caused another wave of pain to shoot through his body, his chest spasming and his coughing reflex triggered. His hand jerked away from the table, and his body twisted into a coughing fit.

Each cough wracked his body with pain, his chest feeling as if someone was stabbing him with a thousand knives, leaving Goku slumped against the pillows, his body shaking and his breath coming in ragged gasps. He squeezed his eyes shut, trying to grit past the pain.

When he eventually opened his eyes again, he found that he was once covered in a scattering of blood-streaked petals from the flowers he had coughed up. Their sweet, pungent smell hung thick in the air.

Disgust and dread coiled in his gut at the sight of the petals. They were a constant reminder of the sickness that was afflicting him, a bizarre and inexplicable illness that he couldn't make sense of. He looked away, and brushed them off of him, his eyes finding his phone once again.

A renewed sense of determination filled him. He had to reach his phone. He had to ask Bulma for help. He couldn't just lie here and let himself get sicker.

Goku reached out and grabbed his phone with trembling hands, pulling it close to him. He managed to unlock it, the small action feeling like it had drained him of the last of his energy.

But he pushed through the exhaustion and the pain, opening the contacts app on his phone with fumbling fingers. He quickly scrolled through the names until he found Bulma's, pressing the call button. He held the phone up to his ear and waited.

Ring, ring, ring...

Each ring of the phone felt like it dragged on forever. Goku waited, his impatience and desperation mounting with every passing second, his heart pounding against his aching ribs. *C'mon, pick up…*

The phone rang on, but there was no answer. Goku could feel his hope starting to dwindle with every unanswered ring.

In the end, the call went straight to voicemail, her cheerful voice instructing him to leave a message.

Goku groaned, frustration and irritation coursing through him. Why wasn't she answering? He tried calling her again, but got the same result. Straight to voicemail.

He ended the call, sighing heavily. It seemed as if going to see Bulma in person was the only option now.

He took a moment to steady himself, gathering what little energy he had left. Then he closed his eyes, focusing on Bulma's energy signature. It took him a moment due to his energy. Once he found it, he latched onto it and vanished from the room in a crackle of air.

A moment later, he appeared in the middle of Bulma's lab, the sudden teleportation making him sway slightly.

He looked around the room, eyeing the various machines and gadgets that filled the space.

"Bulma?" He called out, looking for signs of the blue-haired genius. "You here?"

There was a shuffle from a nearby corner, and Bulma emerged from behind a large machine, looking slightly flustered.

"Goku! What are you doing here?" She asked, clearly surprised by his sudden arrival. She tilted her head before raising an eyebrow. "And what are you sitting on the floor for…?"

Goku gave her a sheepish smile, scratching his head. "Hey, Bulma. Sorry for dropping in unannounced. I, uh, kinda need your help with something."

Bulma raised an eyebrow, looking him up and down. "Help with something?"

Goku fidgeted under her gaze, her analytical mind already working to deduce the reason for his visit.

He cleared his throat, feeling a bit self-conscious under her scrutiny. "Yeah, it's… well, it's kind of a weird situation, actually."

Bulma crossed her arms, leaning against her workbench. "Okay, now you got me intrigued. What kind of weird situation are we talking about here?"

Goku shifted his weight, unsure of how to explain his issue without sounding crazy. "Well, it's... I've been having these coughing fits lately. And they're getting worse. And, um..."

He trailed off, scratching the side of his head, trying to find the words to describe what he was experiencing.

Bulma's expression shifted from intrigued to concerned. "Coughing fits, huh? That doesn't sound good. Have you been to see a doctor about this?"

Goku grimaced, shaking his head. "Well, Chichi wanted me to go to a hospital, but I… I don't want to. I don't think they'd be able to help me, anyway."

Bulma pursed her lips, her eyes narrowing in thought. "What makes you think they wouldn't be able to help? They're medical professionals, they deal with all kinds of illnesses and conditions every day. They could run tests, give you medication, figure out what's causing the coughing."

Goku shrugged, feeling a pang of guilt for not being honest with her. "The thing is... I don't think it's a normal illness, Bulma. It's… It's different."

Bulma's curiosity was piqued even further. "Different how?"

Goku took a deep breath, bracing himself for her reaction. He knew he had to tell her the truth, or at least part of it.

"...Promise you won't think I'm crazy?"

Bulma chuckled slightly.

"When have I ever thought you're *not* crazy?" she teased, a smirk playing on her lips. "But seriously, I promise I won't think you're crazy. Now tell me what's going on. I'm all ears."

Goku swallowed, his heart pounding in his chest. "Well, when I cough, I… I spit up flowers. Purple ones."

Bulma's eyes widened in shock, her mouth falling open. "Hold on, you… spit up *flowers* ? Like actual, physical, *flowers* ?"

Goku nodded, his face flushing with embarrassment. "Yeah, I don't know how or why it's happening, but it is. It's been getting worse over the past few weeks, and I'm starting to get worried."

Bulma was silent for a moment, absorbing the information he had just given her.

"Huh, well, that's... definitely not something I've heard of before." She pushed herself off the workbench, coming closer to him. "And you said it's gotten worse over the past few weeks? How often do you cough up these flowers? Like how many at a time?"

Goku winced, feeling exposed under her intense gaze. "It started out with just a few petals, but now it's happening multiple times a day and it's entire flowers. It's like I'm a human vase or something."

Bulma's mind was whirling with the implications of what he was describing. "And you don't have any other symptoms? It's just the coughing?"

"Well, I am a bit nauseated and my chest has been hurting too. Oh, also my fingers are a little tingly, not to mention my throat is sore from all the coughing I've been doing, but that's about it." Goku admitted.

Bulma nodded thoughtfully, her mind already formulating theories. "Okay, and you have no idea how this started? No recent accidents, no contact with any strange plants or animals, nothing like that?"

Goku rubbed his chin, trying to recall the circumstances surrounding the first coughing fit. "Not that I'm aware of…? The chest pain has been going on for a while now. I thought it was just a muscle strain or something. But it's been getting worse, and that's when I started coughing up the flowers."

He left out the part about Vegeta, knowing it would only lead to more questions he wasn't ready to answer.

Bulma furrowed her brow in thought. "Huh, that's strange. The chest pain and the flowers are probably connected somehow. And the nausea and tingling in your fingers too. I'll have to run some tests to see what's going on."

Goku nodded, feeling relieved that Bulma was taking him seriously. "Yeah, I figured as much. Just don't get too invasive with them, okay?"

Bulma rolled her eyes, used to his lack of trust in medical procedures. "I'll try not to. We'll start with some blood work and an EKG."

"Whoa, wait a minute. Blood work?" Goku paled in response. He scooted back slightly, his eyes widening in fear. "You mean you have to stick me with *needles* ?!"

Bulma crossed her arms, her expression stern. "Yes, Goku. We have to take a sample of your blood to run tests. It's standard procedure. Oh, come on... Don't look so grim. It's just a small pinprick, you won't even feel it."

Bulma, noticing Goku's panicked expression, sighed. "Alright, look, I'll make a deal with you. You let me take a sample of your blood without running away, and I'll get you some of your favorite ramen afterwards."

Goku perked up at the mention of ramen. "You'll get me ramen if I let you take my blood?"

Bulma nodded. "Yep, I'll get you the biggest bowl of ramen you've ever seen if you hold still and let me take the blood sample."

At first it almost got him to listen, but then Goku's expression soured, the thought of food stirring a queasy feeling in his stomach. He knew that even his favorite ramen wouldn't taste right if he was coughing up flowers all the time.

Bulma noticed the change in his expression and frowned. "What's wrong? You love ramen, I thought that would motivate you."

Goku shook his head, a wave of nausea washing over him. "I...I don't think I can eat much of anything right now. I think this condition is messing with my appetite, All I could really handle was some Miso soup yesterday It hurts too much to swallow."

Bulma's expression softened, her scientific mind already suspecting what was wrong. "Really? Huh, that's interesting. It's possible that your body isn't processing food the way it should. And the chest pain, too, that might be a sign of something wrong with your digestive tract. Although it still doesn't explain why you'd be coughing up flowers."

Goku grimaced, rubbing his temples. "I don't get it, Bulma. Why is the coughing up flowers part happening at all? It's the weirdest thing I've ever experienced. And it feels like the pain and the coughing are getting worse every day."

Bulma sighed, her mind already going through all of the possible explanations, as she grabbed a syringe from her desk. "I wish I could give you an immediate answer, Goku. But I have to run some tests before I can say anything for sure. And that means I need a blood sample. So can you hold still for me, please?"

Goku's panic levels were rising as Bulma mentioned the needles again. He stepped back and began to hyperventilate, his chest constricting with fear. "No...no needles...please..."

Before Bulma could respond, Goku was suddenly wracked with another coughing fit. He doubled over, choking and gasping for air.

Bulma watched in concern as Goku struggled with the coughing, wincing as he retched up more purple flowers. She knew she needed to take a sample of his blood as soon as possible, but it seemed that Goku's anxiety was only making his condition worse.

"Goku, you need to calm down," Bulma tried to soothe him, kneeling down and placing a hand on his arm. "You're only making it worse by panicking. We have to do the blood work if we want to figure out what's going on."

Goku shook his head, still struggling to catch his breath. "No… I won't… those needles…"

Bulma took a deep breath, realizing that logical reasoning wasn't going to work on him in this state. She needed backup, someone strong enough to restrain him while she took the blood sample. And she knew just the person for the job.

She turned to one of her lab assistants, a nervous-looking man named Kyte. "Kyte, go find Vegeta and tell him to come down to the lab now. Tell him it's an emergency."

Kyte, who was well aware of Goku's dislike for all things medical, paled at the thought of calling Vegeta. But he nodded and hurried off to find him nonetheless.

Meanwhile, Bulma turned her attention back to Goku, who was still struggling to catch his breath. She rubbed his back reassuringly, trying to calm him down. "It's okay. Just take slow, deep breaths. Vegeta is on his way, so you have to try to relax until then."

But Goku wasn't listening, his mind consumed with his irrational fear of needles and his weakening body. He retched up more flowers, gasping for air between each cough.

Bulma's concern only grew as Goku's coughing fit persisted, his body shaking with the effort of each heave. He doubled over again, coughing up another handful of purple flowers.

She had never seen him like this before, so afraid and out of control.

Suddenly, the doors to the medical wing burst open, and Vegeta strode in, his expression dark with irritation.

He took in the sight of Goku hunched over, coughing and retching up flowers, and his irritation morphed into confusion and concern. "What the hell is going on here?"

Bulma turned to face him, her hands on her hips. "About damn time, Vegeta. I need your help with something."

Vegeta raised an eyebrow. "Help with *what* ? And what's wrong with Kakarot?"

Bulma sighed, gesturing towards Goku. "He's having some… medical issues. And he's refusing to let me take a simple blood sample. That's where you come in. I need you to restrain him while I take the sample."

Vegeta's expression darkened even further at her request. "You want me to hold him down like some kind of wild animal? Why don't you do it yourself? You're the one who needs the sample."

Bulma rolled her eyes, knowing that he wasn't going to make this easy. "You know damn well why I'm asking you. You're the only one who can hold him down long enough for me to draw the blood. Just do it, and I'll explain everything later."

Vegeta gritted his teeth, knowing that she was right. He approached Goku, who was still coughing and retching. "Ugh, fine. Kakarot, calm down. It's just a little blood, you're being ridiculous."

Goku looked up at him, his eyes wide with fear. "I-I can't... needles… no needles…"

Vegeta's irritation spiked at Goku's childish behavior.

"...Stop being a baby. You've faced much more powerful opponents than some damn needle, so what are you so afraid of?" He grabbed Goku's arms, trying to hold him still. When he found himself socked in the nose, his irritation spiked.

Goku was frantic, a new coughing fit wracking his body. He thrashed against Vegeta's grip, his body weak but his panic making him strong. "I said no needles, let go!"

Vegeta grunted in frustration, struggling to keep Goku still. "Dammit, you idiot, stop flailing around! It's just going to hurt more if you don't hold still already! Just let Bulma take the sample already, so we can get this over with."

He used more of his strength to pin Goku down, holding him still despite his struggles and coughs.

Bulma approached them, syringe in hand. She knew she had to act fast before Goku's panic made the situation worse.

"Okay, Vegeta, hold him down tightly. I have to take the sample quickly."

Vegeta nodded, his grip on Goku's arms tightening. Goku's coughing fit was starting to subside, but he was still in a panic. "Hurry up, woman. He's already a mess and it's pissing me off."

Bulma positioned the needle at the crook of Goku's elbow, her movements steady and efficient. "Just stay still, Goku. It's going to be just a little prick."

She inserted the needle, quickly filling the vial with the blood she needed. Goku cried out in pain and tried to pull away, but Vegeta's grip on him was unyielding.

Once she had taken enough blood to run the tests, Bulma withdrew the needle and placed a cotton swab underneath a bandage over the tiny puncture wound. She then put the vial of blood aside and looked at Vegeta, sighing. "Alright. You can let him go now."

"Finally…" Vegeta huffed and released Goku, standing back and watching as the other saiyan slowly caught his breath. He crossed his arms, his irritation now directed towards Bulma. "Now can you please explain to me what's going on, already? Why was he coughing up flowers?"

Bulma nodded, holding up the vial of blood. "I'll have to run some tests on this first, but I can tell you that Goku's condition is definitely not normal. He has some kind of internal issue that's causing his body to malfunction."

Vegeta's eyes widened in surprise. "His body is malfunctioning? What does *that* mean?"

Bulma shrugged, still looking at the blood. "I'm not sure yet. But I suspect it has something to do with his stomach or digestive system. If you can, I want you to bring him back to the infirmary for me. I need to keep an eye on him and run more tests as soon as possible to figure out what's causing this. Can you do that for me?"

Vegeta scowled at the thought of having to babysit a sick and panicky Goku, but he reluctantly nodded. "...Fine. But you better get to the bottom of this quickly. I have better things to do than play nurse to him."

After all the time Vegeta had spent avoiding him, hearing the comment stung, but Goku chose not to say anything.

Bulma smiled weakly, knowing that he wasn't happy about the situation. "Great, sure. I'll be down there in a bit after I check out this blood sample."

Vegeta grunted in response, moving to help Goku to his feet. "Come on, Kakarot. Let's get you checked out. And try not to be a pain in the ass, for once."

As Vegeta steadied him, the ache in Goku's chest lessened to almost nothing. The moment Vegeta's fingers closed around his arm, the pain faded away as if he was being healed. He leaned heavily into Vegeta, his legs weak and shaking.

Vegeta grumbled, feeling the familiar weight of Goku against him. "Can you walk on your own or do I have to carry you?"

Goku shook his head, his grip on Vegeta's arm tightening. "I… I can't… my legs feel weird...."

"Oh, for fuck's sake…" Vegeta rolled his eyes, realizing that Goku was truly in no condition to walk. "Here…"

With a small blush, he wrapped a strong arm around Goku's back and another beneath his knees, easily hoisting him up into a bridal carry.He muttered under his breath.

Goku yelped in surprise as he was suddenly picked up off the ground, instinctually putting his arms around Vegeta's neck to keep from falling. He blinked, feeling the pain in his chest become replaced by a warm, almost fuzzy feeling.

Despite his initial grumbling, Vegeta found himself surprisingly unbothered by the weight of Goku. It was familiar, in a way, and he realized that this was the most intimate he'd been with the other Saiyan in a long time.

"You weigh as much as a damn elephant," he grumbled as they started towards the infirmary.

Goku didn't reply, too dazed and worn out to form a proper response. He nestled his face against Vegeta's chest, feeling oddly comforted by the steady thrumming of the other Saiyan's heartbeat.

Vegeta arched an eyebrow at Goku's uncharacteristic silence but said nothing. He continued to carry Goku in his arms, the feeling of the other Saiyan's body pressed against his own stirring a strange sensation in his chest.

Vegeta carried Goku into the infirmary, carefully laying him down on one of the medical beds. He watched as Goku sank back against the pillows, his eyes half-lidded and his body trembling with exhaustion.

Goku couldn't help but feel a tinge of disappointment when Vegeta let go of him, the familiar pain creeping back into his chest, but he wouldn't say it out loud.

Vegeta stood by the bed, looking down at Goku with a mixture of irritation and something else entirely. He tried to ignore the concern he felt at seeing the other Saiyan in such a weakened state.

"Stay here, and don't do anything stupid," he ordered gruffly. "Bulma's going to be back here soon to run more tests on you."

Vegeta turned to walk away, but, as he started to leave, he heard Goku's voice, weak and panicked. "Wait, don't go..."

After weeks of barely hearing anything from him, and *months* of Vegeta continuously avoiding him, Goku couldn't let him leave *now* . He needed to talk to him. Vegeta's presence was like a life line, the only thing that had offered him any kind of relief from whatever this was.

He paused, looking back at Goku, who was struggling to sit up on the bed. Another coughing fit wracked his body, more purple flower petals spilling forth onto the sheets.

Vegeta's irritation flared at the sight of those damn flowers. He didn't know what they were or why Goku was coughing them up, but seeing the other Saiyan in this much distress didn't sit well with him.

He grumbled under his breath and returned to Goku's bedside, urging him to lay back down. "Alright, I'm not going anywhere. Just stop coughing already, it's annoying."

Goku gasped and wheezed, the coughing fit subsiding as Vegeta spoke. He was too exhausted to resist, letting the prince push him back down onto the bed. He looked up at him, his eyes watery and pleading. "Don't leave me, please…"

Vegeta grunted, crossing his arms. Seeing Goku's pleading expression was messing with his irritation, making his chest feel tight in a way he didn't like. "I just told you I'm not going anywhere, didn't I? What, you want me to hold your hand or something?"

Goku nodded weakly, reaching out blindly with one trembling hand. "Yeah. If you would..."

"...Wait, you're *serious* , aren't you…?" Vegeta was taken aback by Goku's plea, his usual reaction would be to smack his hand away and tell him to grow up . But something about the vulnerability in Goku's eyes made him hesitate. "Damn it…"

He reluctantly took Goku's outstretched hand, enclosing it in his own. "Fine, you big baby…. Happy now?"

Goku closed his eyes, letting out a sigh of relief as he felt Vegeta's fingers intertwine with his. He squeezed Vegeta's hand weakly, a small smile forming on his face. The pain in his chest had lessened once more, eased by Vegeta's touch. He relaxed against the pillows, looking up at him with a grateful expression.

"Yeah...thanks." He whispered, his voice hoarse from coughing.

"Don't mention it." Vegeta scowled. "As I said before, Bulma will probably be here soon to run her stupid tests, so just rest for now."

Goku nodded weakly, his grip on Vegeta's hand loosening slightly as he closed his eyes, taking slow, measured breaths as he tried to will himself to relax. Down deep, he wanted so badly to say something more, to ask him why he'd been avoiding him; Confront him about his feelings, but, just like so many times before that, no words would come out. Instead, all he could do was focus on the feeling of Vegeta's hand in his own, a silent anchor keeping him grounded.

Vegeta watched as Goku's breathing becoming slower and more even as he began to drift off. He knew that he should pull his hand away, but in the end he was unable to bring himself to do so.

He stood there silently, his hand still clutching Goku's as his mind swirled with a maelstrom of emotions he didn't understand. He was used to seeing Goku as his rival, his equal in battle and strength. How was he *supposed* to process this?

Taking a seat at his bedside, he found himself letting out a breath he didn't know he was holding in.

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END CHAPTER 4

Chapter 5

Story: A Heart's Bloom, Chapter 5

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Vegeta found himself jolted from his thoughts by the sound of footsteps approaching. Looking up, he saw Bulma walking towards them, a notebook in her hand.

"How's he doing?" She asked as she approached. She cast a worried glance at Goku's exhausted form, taking in the sight of him with a mix of concern and confusion.

Vegeta grunted, not releasing his grip on Goku's hand.

"He's settled down," he admitted. "But he started coughing up those damn flowers again earlier."

Bulma noted Vegeta's refusal to let go of Goku's hand, but didn't comment on it. She pulled up a chair beside the bed and sat down, opening her notebook to a fresh page.

"I've been able to run some basic tests on the blood sample I took, and there's definitely an abnormality. His cells are responding strangely to something, but I can't pinpoint exactly what it is yet."

Vegeta's irritation flared. "What do you mean you don't know what it is? You're supposed to be the genius here. Can't you do something useful?"

Bulma shot Vegeta a glare, her irritation matching his. "This isn't one of my machines or gadgets, Vegeta. This is an internal issue, I can't just wave a wand and fix it instantly. It's going to take some time to figure out what's going on."

Vegeta huffed, but didn't argue further. He looked down at Goku, noticing that the other Saiyan had woken up faintly at their conversation, his eyes fluttering open, but he quickly fell back to sleep.

"Just figure it out quickly… I… I don't like seeing him like this." Vegeta said, his voice quieter than usual, betraying a hint of vulnerability.

"I'll work as fast as I can," Bulma assured him. "In the meantime, you'll just have to keep an eye on him and let me know if his condition gets worse."

Bulma closed her notebook and set it aside, turning her attention to Goku. "I'm going to need to run a few more tests now. Just basic stuff: EKG, blood pressure, those kinds of things. He shouldn't need to move much for these."

Vegeta grunted in agreement, reluctantly releasing Goku's hand as Bulma began her work. He stood back, watching as she took Goku's vitals and attached pads to his chest for the EKG.

Goku awoke again from the movement, his eyes half-lidded and disoriented. He looked around, confusion spreading across his face as he saw Bulma attaching the pads to his chest. "What's going on...?"

Bulma gave him a reassuring smile as she finished attaching the pads. "I'm just doing some tests on you, it's nothing to worry about. Just try to stay still for me, okay?"

Goku nodded weakly, his movements slow and labored. He glanced at Vegeta, who was standing a few feet away, arms crossed over his chest.

Once she was done, Bulma turned on the machine and the rhythm of Goku's heartbeat was soon echoing through the room, filling the tense silence.

Vegeta watched the monitor, his eyes fixed on the pattern of peaks and valleys. He didn't understand what the numbers truly meant, but he can sense that Bulma is looking for something in specific.

Bulma studied the EKG readout, her brow furrowing slightly. The rhythm of Goku's heart rate had a few skips and beats that were slightly off, almost too subtle for someone without medical training to notice.

"Hmm...there are some minor anomalies in his heart rate..." she muttered, making a few notes in her notebook.

"What kind of anomalies?" Vegeta asked, his tone brusque but betraying a hint of worry behind it.

Bulma continued to study the readout, her eyes scanning the lines. "It's the rhythm. It's nothing life-threatening, but it isn't as steady as it should be."

Vegeta scowled, his irritation growing. "So there's something wrong with his heart as well? What the hell is happening to him? You don't think this could somehow be connected to the heart virus he had all those years ago, do you?"

Bulma shook her head, still studying the readout.

"No, I don't think so. Whatever is causing this, it's new. I think we need to look a little deeper into this," she said, unplugging the pads from Goku's chest. "Goku, I'm going to need to move you to the exam room for a CT scan. Can you stand up?"

Goku nodded weakly, his eyes still half-lidded with exhaustion. He tried to sit up on the bed, but his limbs felt heavy and sluggish. He attempted to lift himself up, but his arms trembled, and he slumped back onto the pillows. His arms were tingling even worse than before, as if the circulation was being cut off.

Vegeta's irritation flared again at the sight, his jaw clenching.

"Do I have to do *everything* for you?" he grumbled, stepping forward.

Without waiting for a response, he scooped Goku up in his arms once more, lifting him off the bed bridal style. Goku gasped softly as he was lifted, his body instinctively leaning into Vegeta's, seeking comfort and support.

Vegeta gritted his teeth, ignoring the warm feeling that spread through his chest at the touch. He walked out of the room and towards another section of the infirmary.

Bulma followed after them, her notebook clutched in her hand. She silently observed as Vegeta carried Goku past the control room into the exam room, noting the way Goku leaned into him, almost as if seeking comfort.

"Some of the pain goes away whenever you hold me like this." Goku murmured, nuzzling up against his chest.

Vegeta stiffened slightly at the comment, his heart rate giving a strange flutter.

"...Idiot, now's not the time to be clingy," he grumbled, his voice lacking its usual bite.

But he didn't make any attempt to push Goku away or let go of him as he continued to walk. The feeling of the other Saiyan in his arms was both familiar and foreign, stirring a strange mixture of annoyance and protectiveness within him.

Bulma ushered them into the exam room and gave Goku a quick rundown of what would happen, including the need for him to remain completely still for the thirty minute duration and the eventual IV contrast.

"Alright, Goku, we're going to do two separate scans, the first one without contrast and the second one with it. I need you to lay completely still now while I run the scan, or it could mess up the images and we'll have to take them again." Bulma guided Goku to lie back on the table, making sure his body was properly situated, before pulling out a small box of ear plugs and placing them into his ears. "Here. The machine can get very loud, so these will help block out some of the noise."

Goku winced slightly as the earplugs filled his ears, isolating the sounds from around him. He laid back on the bed, his body a bit stiff and tense. The idea of remaining completely still while the loud machine scanned him wasn't appealing, but he understood the necessity.

Bulma turned towards Vegeta, her face serious. "You'll have to wait outside with me during the scan. The risk of radiation exposure is too dangerous for you to stay here with him."

Vegeta's eyes narrowed, a brief flicker of irritation passing over his face. "I can handle a little radiation just fine. It's not a big deal."

Bulma crossed her arms, meeting Vegeta's gaze head-on. "It's not up for discussion, Vegeta. You can watch from the control room."

Vegeta's jaw clenched, his stubborn streak rearing up. He almost wanted to argue, but he knew better than to challenge Bulma's authority, especially in matters relating to technology and safety.

"Fine." He grunted, his tone sulky and annoyed.

Goku, sensing the tension in the air, opened his eyes a little. He could tell they were talking about him, and the look on Vegeta's face told him enough. Fear and anxiety filled him once again.

"Wait...Vegeta, you're leaving?" he asked weakly, his voice filled with a note of desperation.

Vegeta's eyes widened fractionally at the distressed tone in Goku's voice. He looked down at the other Saiyan, seeing the fear in his eyes, and his throat suddenly felt tight.

"I..." he began, but Bulma interrupted him.

"It's alright, Goku," Bulma reassured him, trying to keep her tone lighthearted. "It's just a safety precaution. We'll be in the control room, watching everything. You're going to be perfectly fine."

Vegeta watched Bulma, his jaw clenching as he saw that Goku's anxiety was spiking at the thought of being separated from him. Despite his better judgment, a part of him almost wanted to say he'd stay, to hell with the radiation risk, but he knew it would only cause more arguments.

"Here, hold onto this, if you need anything, I want you to press that button so I can stop the machine." Bulma handed Goku a small device with a button attached to it. He took it, but didn't say anything. "I'll be back in fifteen minutes to give you the contrast."

And as soon as Goku saw them leave the room, the feeling in his throat began to intensify once more. He tried to swallow, but the itching and tickling didn't subside. As he lay still on the bed, the urge to cough became stronger, the petals in his throat felt as if they were clawing at his insides.

The table began to roar, moving up inside of the donut shape section and making strange noises Goku had never heard before. The earplugs blocked out most of the sounds, but the silence only served to heighten the discomfort. He closed his eyes, focusing on his breathing.

The first five minutes passed slowly. Goku kept his breath as steady as possible, fighting back the overwhelming urge to cough. His eyes remained closed, his mind focused on not making a sound, not disrupting the scan.

But the tickling in his throat was almost unbearable. He could feel the petals rubbing against his windpipe, sending jolts of discomfort up his throat.

Sweat beads formed on his forehead, the effort of keeping still and silent taking its toll. The tickling had progressed into a burning sensation, and he could taste blood at the back of his throat. Each breath felt like a struggle, each second like an eternity.

The next five minutes were pure torture. Goku silently pleaded for the scan to finish soon, for the pain and itchiness to end. His hands were clenching the sides of the table, his knuckles white from the force of his grip. Each beat of his heart echoed in his ears, the sound deafening.

Finally, after what felt like forever, the last five minutes passed. Goku heard a beep and the loud noises of the machine ceased. When the table rolled back out from inside the donut, he almost immediately, he started coughing, the force of it sending sharp stabs of pain through his chest.

He felt blood in his mouth, the metallic taste acrid and bitter. The petals that had tormented him moments ago now lay discarded around him, a testament to his struggle to remain silent.

The door opened, and Bulma rushed in, followed closely by Vegeta. A look of concern crossed Vegeta's face as he saw Goku struggling and coughing, the exam table littered with bloody flower petals.

Bulma immediately went to Goku's side, rubbing his back gently. "It's alright, get it all out."

Vegeta stood by her side, his eyes fixed on Goku's face. The sight of the other Saiyan in such distress was more unnerving than he cared to admit, each cough making his chest tighten. He almost wanted to say something, *anything* to let Goku know that he was worried, but his voice seemed to fail him.

At long last, the coughing subsided. Goku's breaths were shallow and labored, his body trembling with exhaustion.

"Listen, I'm going to have to get one more scan, this time with contrast. I need you to stay still for me while I administer it, okay?" As Bulma began to prepare the IV, Goku's face paled slightly, his eyes darting to the needle in Bulma's hand, the mere sight of the sharp metal tip sending a chill down his spine.

He remembered the sharp pain of the needle from the blood test earlier and the idea of being pricked again sent a shiver down his spine.

"Wait, wait," He said, his voice filled with unease. "You mean I have to get another shot?"

Bulma paused, recognizing the look on his face. "Well, yes, Goku. Unfortunately, the contrast dye has to be injected through an IV for the CT scan. It'll make it so I can see your internal organs more clearly."

Goku looked distressed, his eyes darting back to the needle and then to Bulma. He swallowed hard, his throat dry. "But...the needle… it hurts..."

Bulma softened her tone, trying to reassure him. "I know needles can be a little scary, but the pain is only temporary. We need to make sure we can see everything properly to find out what's wrong with you."

"Still-" Goku continued to stare at the needle, his breathing becoming slightly shallower. He felt trapped, cornered by his own fear and the necessity of the scan.

Vegeta was watching Goku carefully. He wasn't used to seeing the other Saiyan so unsettled, especially by something as seemingly minor as a needle. He stepped forward, placing a hand on Goku's shoulder, his voice gruff, but surprisingly gentle.

"Forget the stupid needle…" he commanded.

Goku's eyes flicked towards Vegeta, his expression still betraying his unease. His heart was pounding in his chest, the fear of the needle clawing at his senses. But there was a strange

comfort in Vegeta's steady gaze and the firmness of his grip on his shoulder.

"Don't even *look* at it. Just focus on me." Vegeta's voice remained gruff, but there was a hint of reassurance in it, a subtle attempt to distract Goku.

Goku took a shaky breath. He could still sense the cold, metallic instrument being prepared beside him, but he tried as best as he could to ignore it.

Goku's eyes locked onto Vegeta's face. He felt a strange sense of security in Vegeta's tone, the steady gaze pulling his attention away from the needle. His breathing began to slow slightly, the fear not entirely gone, but somewhat eased.

Bulma watched the interaction with a hint of surprise. She had never seen Vegeta act so gentle towards Goku before, even if his tone was still brusque and aloof. She continued preparing the IV, silently thankful that the other Saiyan was able to somewhat ease Goku's anxiety.

Once the IV was ready, Bulma moved closer to Goku. "Okay, I'm going to insert the needle now. Just keep looking at Vegeta, alright?"

Goku's throat went dry, fear and tension coiling within him. He nodded weakly, his gaze locked onto Vegeta's face.

Bulma gently disinfected the area where she would insert the needle, her touch firm but gentle. She could sense Goku's anxiety, his eyes still locked on Vegeta's face.

"Just hold still, this will only take a moment," she reassured him.

Goku nodded again, his eyes never leaving Vegeta's face. He whimpered as the needle pierced his skin, his hand clenching into a fist. Despite his best efforts to stay still, he couldn't help the loud whimper that escaped his lips, tears welling up in his eyes.

Vegeta's jaw clenched, his grip on Goku's shoulder tightening marginally. He could see the pain on Goku's face, the vulnerability etched in every line, and it stirred a strange feeling in his chest. He wanted to look away, to feign indifference, but he couldn't seem to tear his gaze away from Goku's pleading eyes.

Bulma finished the IV quickly, securing the needle in place.

"Alright, that's it. You did good," she said softly, trying to soothe his obvious distress.

Goku's chest was still heaving as he tried to control his labored breathing. The tears still clung to his eyelashes, their wetness catching the harsh fluorescent light. His eyes were still locked on Vegeta, seeking comfort and reassurance.

"I'm going to give you the IV contrast now." Bulma said. "You might feel some heat and a sensation that you have to use the bathroom. But don't worry, it's completely normal and harmless."

Goku's eyes widened slightly at the description, his unease growing. He swallowed hard, his eyes darting between Bulma and Vegeta. "It... It won't hurt, will it?" he asked timidly.

Bulma shook her head, trying to reassure him. "No, it won't hurt. It's just a strange sensation, and it'll only last for a minute. I promise, it's completely safe."

Goku drew in a shaky breath. He glanced at Vegeta whose gaze was still firmly planted on him, a reassuring presence. Drawing courage from the other Saiyan's unwavering gaze, he nodded slowly and closed his eyes.

"Okay...I'm ready." he said, his voice barely above a whisper.

Bulma pressed the plunger on the syringe, slowly injecting the IV contrast. For a few moments, nothing unusual happened. But then, Goku felt a warm sensation spread throughout him, just as Bulma had described. It wasn't painful, just… weird. He shifted slightly, the feeling of having to pee almost overwhelming.

Vegeta found himself gripping Goku's shoulder tighter, offering silent reassurance. "You're doing fine."

Goku's eyes were squeezed shut, his breath coming in shallow puffs. The warmth coursing through his veins was foreign and uncomfortable, and the urge to use the bathroom was more intense now. He couldn't help the small whimper that escaped his lips, his body tensing further as his face became slightly flushed.

"It's okay. Just a few more seconds, and it'll be over," Bulma said softly, her voice soothing. She could see the distress on Goku's face, knowing that the reaction to the IV contrast wasn't pleasant, but completely normal.

Goku nodded weakly, his eyes still firmly shut. He was holding his breath, the sensation of warmth and feeling like he was going to pee himself overpowering. He focused on the feeling of Vegeta's hand gripping his shoulder, using it as an anchor to ground himself through the discomfort.

As the final moments ticked by, the sensation slowly faded. Goku felt a strange emptiness as the warmth receded, and the urgent need to use the bathroom lessened. His eyes slowly fluttered open, his breathing a little unsteady.

"Feeling better?" Bulma asked, as Goku's breathing was evening out.

The strange and uncomfortable sensations were fading, and he was starting to feel somewhat normal again. After giving a small nod, Goku turned his head to look at Vegeta, their eyes meeting for a moment, an unspoken understanding passing between them.

"Now, this next scan shouldn't take as long as the first one did. I'll give it about ten minutes. Do you think you can handle it?"

Goku swallowed hard, the taste of blood still lingering in his mouth. He closed his eyes for a moment, steadying his breathing. The mere thought of enduring another scan was daunting, but he knew he didn't have a choice. He didn't trust his voice to speak, so he just nodded weakly in agreement.

"Just lay back for me. Try to stay as still as possible, we'll be right outside, okay?" Bulma gently pressed Goku back onto the bed, avoiding the bloody flowers.

He trembled as she positioned him for the scan, taking a deep breath to steady himself. Despite the temptation to protest, he bit his lip and tried to remain calm, knowing it would be counterproductive.

Vegeta lingered by the door, his gaze fixed on Goku's face. The sight of the other Saiyan's vulnerability tugged at him once more, a nagging voice urging him to stay. But heeding Bulma's authority, he followed her into the control room, the sound of the door closing echoing in his ears.

Back inside the room, Goku was left with overwhelming silence once again broken by the distant sounds of the machine roaring. The ear plugs blocked out some of the noise, but they couldn't drown out the fear and uncertainty that now engulfed him.

The itch in his throat once again returned, the petals scratching against his windpipe. Goku fought against the urge to cough again, his whole body tense and rigid as he tried to stay perfectly still, the solitude amplifying the anxious thoughts swirling in his mind.

It took all his willpower to keep his breathing steady, to swallow down the rising urge to cough. He closed his eyes, focusing on his breathing, begging the minutes to pass by quicker.

He longed in that moment for Vegeta's touch, the reassurance of his voice. But he was alone, with nothing but the pain in his chest.

Finally, after what felt like forever, the machine beeped once more, the table moving back in place once more and signaling the end of the second scan. Goku let out a shaky breath of relief, the tension easing from his body slightly. He sat up slowly, spitting out a few more bloodied flower petals on the bed.

The door opened a moment later, Bulma quickly entering the room, followed closely by Vegeta. Her expression was filled with concern as she saw Goku sitting up, spitting out the petals. She immediately went to his side, reaching out to touch him, but hesitating.

"Alright, you're all done now. How are you feeling?" she asked, her voice quiet. Her eyes scanned over Goku's face, noting the traces of blood at the corners of his mouth and the paleness of his skin.

"I'm...fine," Goku whispered, his voice raspy and strained. "Just tired."

Bulma placed a gentle hand on his shoulder, her fingers tracing a soothing pattern on his skin. She glanced over to Vegeta, her eyes flickering for a moment. She knew he was tense, his usual stoicism masking whatever he was really feeling.

"I'm going to have to keep him at capsule corp for a while, to monitor his condition." she explained, her voice soft. "It may be a bit before I have the results from his CT scan back and am able to tell you what this is, though. Do you think you could bring him back to one of the guest rooms?"

Vegeta's jaw tightened, his eyes narrowing at Bulma's request. In any other circumstance, he'd protest, argue that he had more important things to do than continuing to play nursemaid. But the sight of Goku, pale and exhausted, stirred something deep within him.

He gave a terse nod, uncrossing his arms. "Yeah, whatever."

He stepped forward, approaching the bed where Goku sat and, without a word, he reached down and gently scooped Goku up into his arms, just like before, careful not to jostle him too much.

Goku felt a wave of surprise wash over him as he found himself once again lifted into Vegeta's strong arms. But he was too tired to protest, too weak to struggle, and, truth be told, he didn't *want* to. He just let himself be carried, his head resting against Vegeta's broad chest.

It was relaxing, as if the pain in his chest was lifted, all thanks to Vegeta's touch.

Even as he carried Goku to the guest room, a million thoughts spun in Vegeta's head. The way he leaned into him, the way his breaths were coming out slightly ragged. The memory of the flowers, bloodied in Goku's mouth, was seared into his mind.

This is wrong.

Goku was the one of the strongest people he knew, the one who always bounced back, no matter how hard he was hit. Seeing him this weak like this didn't settle well with him.

Once he reached the guest room, he gently laid Goku down onto the bed. His arms felt oddly empty as he pulled away and watched Goku's body sink into the mattress, a sigh escaping his lips.

A moment of silence passed as Vegeta stood there. His eyes flickered over the other Saiyan's form, the paleness of his skin, the slight tremors in his limbs. He wanted to say something, to *do* something, but the words got stuck in his throat. What was he supposed to say? What was he supposed to do?

What the hell *could* he do?

He was about to leave, about to let his pride get the best of him and return to his own room, when Goku's voice stopped him short. It was a quiet whisper, brittle and weak, but it echoed in the silence of the room.

"Wait, don't go…," Goku looked at Vegeta with half-open eyes, pleading, "Stay with me... please..."

Just like before.

Vegeta froze, his heart racing at Goku's plea. He yearned to respond with his usual indifference, but this time the words wouldn't come.

He sighed heavily and sat down on the bed, the mattress sagging under his weight. He was just inches away from Goku now. The room was quiet, except for their breathing, leaving Vegeta with too many thoughts in his head to count.

*Why does Kakarot even **want** me here?*

He had treated him like garbage and had been avoiding him for *months* , if he didn't count the rare times he managed to push aside his pride to go spar with him. He could only guess how much his last text message had hurt him considering that the other Saiyan had never responded to it, despite being quick to respond to any others.

But it appeared that trying to push Goku away had only made him want to be around him more.

And he didn't understand why.

Why does he think so highly of me after everything I've done to him?

He was far too kind to people.

Too forgiving, even when the person didn't deserve it.

But that was who Goku was. He had *always* been that way, and despite how much Vegeta had told himself he hated him for it, it was something that had ultimately ended up drawing him *towards* him instead.

He knew he should apologize and tell him he was sorry. But what right did he have to expect forgiveness? If Goku hadn't stumbled into Bulma's lab as sick as a dog, Vegeta wouldn't be here with him right now. He would still be avoiding him.

Why? Because Vegeta was a coward.

A coward who didn't know how to handle people.

He didn't *do* feelings. It scared him. So he ran away from it.

And as a result, he had pushed away one of the only people who ever dared care about him.

But at the end of the day, that was who *Vegeta* was. Cold and ruthless. He was a *warrior* at heart, not some nurturer or a person who comforted others.

And yet, despite himself, some part of him wanted to reassure Goku and take away his pain. To reach out and touch him, even if it was only for a moment.

The tension between his desires and his inability to act on them was enough to drive him mad. The silence in the room was thick, and Vegeta kept his eyes fixed on the wall, his jaw clenched, his heart thumping loudly in his ears.

Goku shifted slightly, and Vegeta noticed out of the corner of his eye that the other Saiyan's arm was moving, as if weakly reaching out to him.

Then, Goku's fingers brushed against Vegeta's hand, the touch gentle and soft. The contact sent a jolt through Vegeta, his heart skipping a beat.

He looked down at their linked hands, then up at Goku's face. The other Saiyan's eyes were now open, peering up at him with need.

Vegeta tensed, conflicted between his desire to pull away and the strong urge to once again hold Goku's hand.

This wasn't how they communicated.

Unable to endure the intensity of the moment, Vegeta once again looked away, his eyes fixed on the wall in front of him.

The feeling of Goku's hand on his was overwhelming, stirring emotions he wasn't sure he was prepared to handle. Vegeta could feel the heat of Goku's body, the gentle pressure of his fingers around his own.

It was just like before, but it felt different somehow.

They sat like that for a long time, until finally, after what felt like forever, Bulma arrived.

"Alright. I've got the results of the CT scans."

…

END CHAPTER 5

Chapter 6

Story: A Heart's Bloom, Chapter 6

Sorry, y'all, this may end up having a few more chapters than I initially thought. I basically have the entire story written, but I want to keep chapters short.

Also, once again, thank you for all the kudos, comments and support, I hope everybody will stick with me to the end. 🥹

...

Bulma's arrival broke the strange, almost trancelike state Vegeta was in. He quickly disentangled his hand from Goku's, and stood up to lean against the wall, the absence of the touch making him feel strangely cold.

He turned to look at Bulma, his expression stoic once again, hiding the jumble of emotions that were swirling within him.

"Alright. I've got the results of Goku's CT scans." She said, holding up a tablet in her hand. Her eyes scanned over the results on the tablet, her face taking on a more serious expression. She let out a sigh, her fingers tapping against the screen.

"And? What does it say?" Vegeta spoke up, masking his anxiety with a blunt, demanding tone.

"Well, from what I can tell, there appears to be some kind of abnormal growth in his lungs, which is pretty consistent with the symptoms he's been experiencing..." Bulma explained, sounding professional but worried simultaneously.

"Abnormal growth…?" Vegeta's heart pounded in his chest. "Like a tumor or something?"

"Well, not quite," Bulma replied. "It doesn't fit the usual parameters of a tumor, and it's positioned in a peculiar location, along his right pulmonary bronchus... It's unlike anything I've ever seen before. But considering that he's been coughing up flowers, my guess is it's some kind plant matter."

"Plant matter…? Hold on, you're saying Kakarot has *plants growing inside him* ?" Vegeta's voice was laced with a hint of disbelief but also nausea. The thought that there were actual flowers growing inside Goku's lungs… It was both revolting and terrifying.

"I know it sounds crazy, but it's the best working theory based on the information I have so far." Bulma replied matter-of-factly, her voice almost monotone as she discussed the medical jargon. "The growth I observed in the scan has all the characteristics of flowering plants, down to the root system that's starting to spread down into his airways. And since it seems to get worse when he's upset about something, it's possible his energy is affecting its growth rate somehow."

"So… what are you saying?" Vegeta gritted out the words, still trying to wrap his head around the situation. "That this-this *thing* will continue to grow until it... *what* ? Takes over his entire body or something?"

Bulma shook her head, a frown creasing her brow. "I can't say for sure what will happen if the growths remain unchecked, but based on their current state, it's clear they pose a significant risk. Their roots are already growing along his airways, increasing the chances of airway obstruction, which can lead to serious respiratory issues. And the root system appears to be quite complex, so the longer this goes on, the more damage it could end up doing to him..."

"Then… Why not just get rid of them? You're a scientist, aren't you? Figure something out." Vegeta said, his voice betraying a hint of desperation.

"I'm a *scientist* , Vegeta, not a magician." Bulma glared at him slightly. "And while I could have a procedure performed to remove it surgically, it's not that simple. The growths are too intertwined with his pulmonary bronchus, so it can't be removed without potentially damaging his lung. And there's also the matter of its origin. We still don't know where these

plants came from or how they're receiving the necessary resources to grow. So… Given the complexity of the situation and the risk factor involved, the most effective course of action would be to remove the affected lung entirely."

"Remove his lung?" For a moment, Vegeta felt as though the floor had dropped out from under him. "You can't be serious!"

Anger boiled inside him, mixed with fear and anguish. All these years they had known each other, all the battles they had fought, the hardships they had undergone... To think that it might all lead up to this.

"It's the cleanest solution, and honestly, there's a high chance it would be successful." Bulma pressed, sensing that Vegeta needed to hear the practical side of things to quell his emotional response. "The other lung should be able to handle the air exchange on its own. With the right medical care and time, he could still live a full life with just one lung."

"But he'll never be able to *fight* again." The words were bitter on his tongue. They both knew how significant this was. Goku lived for fighting. It was an integral part of his life, of who he was. To take that away from him... It was akin to taking away his very essence.

"I know..." Bulma's voice was quiet, carrying the weight of the implications. "But considering the alternative, it's the best option we've got. Goku's health and well-being have to be the first priority. We can't afford to risk his life for the sake of his pride as a fighter."

Vegeta seethed, his hands clenched into fists. It didn't seem right, to have to make such a sacrifice, both physically and emotionally, for the sake of health.

But deep down, he knew Bulma was right. He'd be damned if he let Goku's life be in danger only because he didn't want him to lose an organ.

Seeing Goku in this state broke something deep within him. The sight of one of the strongest warriors he had ever known reduced to such fragility was *harrowing* .

Usually, he was full of energy, laughing and smiling, standing tall no matter what. He was like the sun, always so bright and constant, the one person who never failed to bring out both the best and the worst in Vegeta.

Despite their rivalry and all the time they had spent fighting and arguing, he had never wanted this for him.

"When would this procedure take place?" He finally asked, his voice barely above a whisper.

"As soon as possible," Bulma replied, her own expression solemn. "I'll make sure everything is prepared for the surgery and we should be able to begin within a few hours. I'll just have to hire a surgeon first."

"Wait. Aren't you going to ask me what *I* think about all this?" Goku, who had been listening silently from his bed, suddenly spoke up, his voice weak but firm.

Both Vegeta and Bulma turned to look at him, surprised to hear him speak up. They had been so focused on the discussion that they had almost forgotten he was an active participant in his own medical fate.

"You know I can still hear you, right?" Goku continued, lifting one hand to cover his mouth as a fit of coughs started to wrack his body. "As the one who's to be on the operating table, I think I should have a say in all of this."

Bulma and Vegeta exchanged a glance, both a little taken aback by Goku's assertion. It was true, they hadn't asked for his input, instead discussing his medical situation as though he wasn't there. But now that he was voicing his opinion, they both fell silent, allowing him to speak.

"I get it, I'm sick," Goku said when the coughing subsided, his voice a little croaky from the effort. "And I know you're trying to help me. But cutting out a whole lung? That's kinda extreme, don't ya think?"

"Goku, you're coughing up flowers," Bulma interjected, her tone stern. "You've got a literal *garden* growing in your lungs. This is *serious* ."

"I know it's serious, I'm not an idiot," Goku retorted, his irritation evident. "But I don't want to lose a lung. Fighting is everything to me. I can't give that away."

Bulma sighed, her expression a mix of sympathy and determination. "Look, I understand how important fighting is to you, but you can't ignore the severity of your condition just because you don't like the proposed solution."

"I'm not ignoring *anything* , I'm fully aware of the situation, Bulma." Goku protested, his lips pressing into a thin, stubborn line. "But there has to be another way. Something that doesn't involve taking out an entire organ."

Bulma shook her head, frustration and worry warring in her eyes. "Goku, you're not thinking rationally. The condition you're in is critical. We can't afford to waste time looking for alternative solutions that may or may not exist."

"Yeah? Well, what if I don't *want* the surgery?" Goku retorted, his eyes locking with hers defiantly. "What if I refuse…?"

Bulma took a deep breath, her jaw setting firmly. "What? You can't just refuse to cooperate. This isn't about what you want, it's about what you need. If you refuse the surgery, the plants will continue to grow, the damage will become irreversible and you could *die* . Is that what you want?"

The words hung heavy in the air, and silence fell across the room. Goku's expression softened, a flicker of uncertainty crossing his face. He knew she was right, he knew the stakes, but the idea of losing a part of himself, of losing his ability to fight was... "It's not like I haven't died before, but at least I could train in the other world just *fine*... "

When Goku said that, something inside of Vegeta snapped.

"Damn it, Kakarot, now you're just being stubborn!" He couldn't hold back his frustration any longer. "You know this is serious, why can't you just accept that you might have to lose a lung?"

Goku bristled at his words.

"And *you're* just being bossy!" He shot back, his voice rising in anger. "You're so fixated on me losing a lung like it's no big deal. Can't you see how important fighting is to me?"

Without any warning, he doubled over into another coughing fit.

Vegeta cursed himself internally for allowing his emotions to take over, knowing all too well how it could exacerbate the situation. The sight of Goku in such distress, coughing up another batch of flowers, was a stark reminder of the seriousness of the situation and how Goku was somehow refusing to understand it.

"This isn't about me being bossy," he gritted out, his voice rough. "This is about you being idiotic. You're so fixated on fighting, you're willing to risk your life over it? Can't you see how crazy that sounds?"

"Alright. Both of you stop it! Arguing over this isn't going solve *anything*... !" Bulma scolded them, but was primarily looking at Vegeta.

Vegeta bit his tongue, the rebuke from Bulma bringing him back to reality. He knew he had let his temper get the best of him, but hearing Goku being so stubborn was infuriating.

Goku had collapsed back onto his bed, still wheezing and coughing, the strength it had taken to argue with him having sapped his energy. His body shook with the effort of each breath. Each cough had ended in a splatter of bright purple petals across his sheets.

The room then fell silent, only the sound of Goku's labored breathing breaking the tense atmosphere. Bulma stood at Goku's bedside, her eyes filled with a mixture of worry and

sadness. Despite her earlier frustration, her heart broke seeing her friend in such a state.

She could see the turmoil in his face, the battle he was fighting within himself. This was tough, tougher than anything they had ever faced before, and there were no clear-cut answers, no easy resolutions.

Finally, she spoke, her voice gentle but firm. "Goku… I know this isn't what you want to hear. But sometimes, life doesn't give us what we want. It gives us what we need, even if it seems unfair. And right now, you need medical help to survive. The surgery is the best chance we have to save you."

Goku weakly shook his head, his body racked with another round of coughing. His voice was hoarse and raspy from the strain, his eyes glassy. "I don't... I don't want to lose my ability to fight, Bulma… it's part of who I am…"

After Goku's statement, Bulma and Vegeta once again exchanged glances. Their eyes spoke volumes as they shared a look of mutual concern and understanding. Bulma's expression was a mixture of determination and resignation. She knew that Goku was going to be difficult to convince. With a deep sigh, she decided to give him some space to process the situation on his own. "Alright, look. I'll give you some medication for the pain for now, and I'll try to look further into this, to see if there's another solution. But I want you to think about what we've discussed. This isn’t a decision to be taken lightly."

"I know…" Goku could barely nod in response. The effort of the conversation had left him feeling drained.

Bulma gave Goku one last lingering look before leaving the room. The door swung shut behind her, leaving Goku alone with his thoughts. He lay there, his breathing still ragged, the room now engulfed in a heavy silence.

Goku closed his eyes, the reality of his situation seeping through the cracks in his defiant exterior. The idea of losing a lung felt like a part of him would be lost forever. Fighting had been his everything, his entire identity since childhood. It was how he defined himself, his sense of self-worth closely tied to it. The thought of not being able to fight anymore, not being able to protect those he cared about... it was terrifying.

His chest ached, each labored breath a reminder of the plants that had invaded his body. Frustration, anger, and fear swirled within him, a maelstrom of emotions that he couldn’t even *begin* to sift through.

He tried to steady his breathing, but each breath seemed to spark off another violent fit of coughing, leaving him gasping for air and spitting out a fresh wave of bloodied flowers onto the white sheets.

Vegeta watched him painfully, trying not to comment. Just seeing him in this state was more than he could handle.

As Bulma re-entered the room, clutching two vials of medication, Goku's head turned weakly towards her. His body seemed to have settled down a bit from the latest fit of coughing, but there was still a haggard quality to his breathing.

Bulma walked over to the bedside, her expression firm and focused.

"Alright, Goku," Bulma said soothingly. "I'm going to give you a couple of injections through your IV. One is for anxiety and the other one is going to help with the pain. It's morphine."

She was grateful she had left the IV in from before or Goku probably would have flown into another panic, which was the last thing she needed right now.

"Why anxiety?" Goku asked, not wanting to take any more medications than necessary.

Bulma gave him a knowing look as she prepared the syringes for the injection.

She took a moment to consider how to explain it to Goku in a way that he could understand. "From what I've observed, I think there may be a connection between your energy and the growth of these flowers. Your energy is heightened by your emotions, right? Well, when you

get anxious, worried, or upset, your energy spikes up. And that seems to be making the flowers grow faster. So the medication is to keep your emotions in check, to make you feel calmer, that way your energy levels will stay more steady, and hopefully the growth of the flowers will slow down. It's all part of a theory I'm working on."

Bulma's words made sense, in some way. He had always known that his emotions had an impact on his energy levels, and that could, in turn, affect his fighting capabilities. Every time he got angry, his power would shoot up. And just now, he had been arguing with Vegeta, letting his emotions get the better of him. He could see how that might have triggered a more intense bout of coughing.

But the thought of a mere emotion, an emotion of all things, having such a direct impact on the flowers and roots inside him still felt baffling. It made him feel both powerless and vulnerable in ways he'd never felt before. "So... you're saying my emotions are making the plants inside of me grow faster?"

Bulma nodded. "Not just your emotions, but your energy as well. When you get upset, your energy shoots up. It's a normal reaction, and it's what makes you so strong. But right now, that's not something that's good for you. Your energy is feeding the plant, it's like fertilizer for it. The more you resist, the more your energy spikes, and the faster the plant grows."

Goku's eyebrows furrowed as he tried to wrap his mind around the concept. "Hm... I guess that makes sense."

Bulma quickly and efficiently prepared one of the syringes and then inserted it into the IV port on Goku's arm. As the medication began to flow through the tubes and into his body, Goku felt a wave of warmth and heaviness slowly spreading throughout him. The medication worked rapidly to calm his racing thoughts and slowed the hammering of his heart.

When Bulma moved on to the other medication however, Goku felt a sudden sharp pain at the back of his neck as it began to flood his system. He couldn't help but jerk against the sensation, letting out a strangled gasp.

"Ugh, that stuff burns, Bulma!" He managed to croak out through gritted teeth as he clutched his neck.

Bulma winced in sympathy as she watched Goku react to it. "I'm sorry, Goku. That's unfortunately a common side effect of the medication. I'll try to dilute it next time to make it more bearable."

Goku nodded, his face twisted in pain, but he tried to hold still. He had dealt with worse pain before, but the unexpected nature of it was terrible. The burning sensation in his neck intensified for a moment, then slowly began to subside.

As the morphine began to take effect, Goku could feel the heavy veil of pain in his chest and throat start to lift.

The pain in his lungs and throat was still there, but it felt... muffled, faded. As if a blanket had been laid over it, insulating him from it.

The morphine was beginning to take effect. Despite the initial discomfort, the drugs were doing their job. Goku's muscles relaxed, his body sinking into the mattress, his eyes becoming glazed.

It was a strange feeling, to be so detached from his own body, yet it wasn't unpleasant. In fact, it was almost... comforting.

"How are you feeling now?" Bulma asked quietly.

Goku mumbled a reply, words blurring together. "S' better. Head... feels fuzzy."

Bulma laughed softly at Goku's state. "Yeah, that's morphine for you. You're likely gonna feel a bit out of it for a while. Just relax and let the medicine do its job, okay?"

Goku nodded slowly, his movements sluggish. He tried to focus on Bulma, but his eyes eventually drifted shut.

Once Goku seemed to be settled comfortably, Bulma turned her gaze toward Vegeta, who had been watching the scene silently, his expression guarded. The situation was far from ideal, and they both knew it.

"I'm going to go back to my lab for a bit," she said softly. "I want to do some more research, see if I can find anything else that can help. Keep an eye on him, alright?"

Vegeta didn't respond immediately, his eyes still fixed on Goku. But after a moment, he nodded slightly, acknowledging her request.

"Yeah," he grunted, his voice gruff but tinged with a hint of worry. "I'll keep watch."

"Thanks," Bulma murmured, relieved that he wasn't going to argue. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

With one final glance at both Goku and Vegeta, she quietly left the room, shutting the door behind her with a soft click.

The room fell silent once more, save for the steady sound of Goku's slow, heavy breathing.

Slowly, Vegeta moved away from the wall and approached Goku's bedside, his eyes roaming over his rival's still form. The usually boisterous, energetic warrior looked so lifeless now.

He could feel his own energy stirring, the Saiyan instincts within him responding to the situation. He wanted to fight, to attack the unseen enemy that had dared to hurt Kakarot. But there was nothing to fight. No enemy to lash out at. Just an enemy that was growing within Goku's body, one that couldn't be beaten with fists alone.

Sighing, he sat down heavily on the edge of the bed, Vegeta's hand hovering hesitantly over Goku's face, his fingers trembling slightly. With a shaky inhale, he gently brushed a strand of

hair back from Goku's forehead, his hand lingering there for a moment longer than necessary.

Damn it, Kakarot...

You're not supposed to be like this. You're supposed to be awake and smiling, annoying me with that stupid optimistic attitude of yours. Not... not laying here, looking like some fragile doll.

…

Bulma was deep in concentration. She had been researching for hours, pouring over medical journals, research notes, and every piece of information she could find on plants and organ damage. She had even used some of her contacts in the scientific community to get access to some unpublished research.

But, so far, she had come up empty-handed. No answers, no leads, no solutions. Frustration was slowly creeping in, mixing with the worry for her friend since childhood.

She took a break, sighing loudly and rubbing her temples. The computer screen in front of her taunted her with its lack of results. She couldn't help but feel a sense of helplessness. Despite all her knowledge and resources, she couldn't find anything that could explain what was happening to Goku, let alone cure it.

She glanced at the clock. It was almost midnight already? She knew she needed rest, she had already pulled an all nighter before Goku had stumbled into her lab sick that day, but the thought of leaving Goku's condition unsolved kept nagging at her. Grumbling, she took a sip of coffee and started searching again, determined to find something, anything.

Dr. Briefs entered the lab, a mug of coffee in his hand. He saw the tired, frustrated look on Bulma's face and approached her. "Working late again?"

"Yeah," Bulma replied, not looking away from the computer screen, her fingers tapping the desk impatiently. "I'm trying to figure out what's wrong with Goku."

Dr. Briefs nodded, concern flickering across his face. "I heard he's not doing well. What's going on with him?"

Bulma finally leaned back in her chair, sighing deeply. "It's... complicated. He's got some kind of... growth inside of his lung. Plants, I think. He's been coughing a lot and it's making it hard for him to breathe. I've been searching for a solution but…"

"You've come up empty-handed?" Dr. Briefs finished for her.

Bulma nodded, frustration clear on her face. "I don't know what else to do. I've looked into everything, but I can't find anything that matches his symptoms. This whole thing is just... bizarre."

Dr. Briefs hummed thoughtfully. "Sounds like a real head-scratcher, but perhaps you should consider looking into supernatural causes for his illness."

"Supernatural? What, you mean like magic or something?" Bulma deadpanned.

Dr. Briefs chuckled again. "I know it sounds silly, but just humor me. Have you ever heard of something called 'Hanahaki disease'?"

"I'm not sure," she admitted honestly. "What is it?"

Dr. Briefs placed his coffee mug down on the counter, his eyes taking on a distant look, like he was remembering something. "I came across it in one of my books once. It's a rare condition where, in a nutshell, a person coughs up flowers because of unrequited love."

"Unrequited love? You're joking, right?" Bulma clearly wasn't amused.

Dr. Briefs chuckled at her skepticism and explained, "No, I'm serious. Hanahaki disease exists in old folklore and stories. It's said to occur when someone has deep, romantic feelings for someone else, but those feelings aren't returned or acknowledged. As a result, they develop a physical illness where they start coughing up flower petals, a symbol of their unrequited love."

Bulma's disbelief was still visible on her face.

"Sounds like an old wives' tale," she rolled her eyes.

Dr. Briefs sighed and leaned against the counter, "I understand your skepticism, but sometimes old legends do contain some elements of truth. Just think about it, Bulma. You're a woman of science. Don't ignore the possibility just because it falls outside of your comfort zone."

Bulma thought for a moment. She had firsthand experience with the seemingly impossible, and not only with the Dragon Balls but many other things as well. And while she was still highly skeptical, she couldn't help but wonder if there could be some truth to this 'Hanahaki disease'.

"Alright, fine, let's say this disease is real," she said, folding her arms. "How do you even cure it? Do you just... give a love confession or something to make it go away?"

Dr. Briefs chuckled softly. "I'm afraid it's not that simple. From what I've read, the only cure for hanahaki disease is for the person's feelings to be returned. In other words, the person they love has to reciprocate their feelings."

Bulma's skepticism returned. "That's ridiculous. You're telling me the only way to cure this 'disease' is through some fairytale romance?"

Dr. Briefs shrugged, "Well, that *is* what the stories say. Hanahaki disease is tied to the power of love itself, and the only cure is for the love to be acknowledged and reciprocated."

Bulma huffed in apparent frustration. But her scientist's mind was working, processing this new information, no matter how far-fetched it seemed.

"So then, what if, hypothetically," she began, her skepticism giving way to a hint of curiosity, "the person they love is... unreachable, or doesn't feel the same way?"

Dr. Briefs considered this for a moment, then answered gently, "Well, that's where it gets tricky. In those situations, the stories say that the disease progresses. The person will continue to cough up flower petals until they can no longer breathe due to the flowers that have bloomed within their lungs. If left untreated, the disease will eventually lead to death."

Bulma's eyes widened in shock and horror.

"Death?" she repeated, almost in a whisper, her skepticism now completely shattered. The idea of someone dying because of their feelings, because of *love* , shook her to the core. She couldn't believe it. She didn't *want* to believe it. "...Dad, this isn't a fairytale. There's got to be some logical explanation for this."

Dr. Briefs looked at her sympathetically, understanding her shock. "I know it's a lot to take in, honey, but try to keep an open mind. We've seen all kinds of things in this world that defy both logic *and* science. It's possible that this disease does have an explanation, but we just don't understand it yet."

Reluctantly, Bulma thought over his words, about to dismiss him again, when, all of a sudden, a memory tugged at her, a vague recollection of a conversation about this exact disease.

"Wait," She said slowly, her mind beginning to whirr. "I think I might have heard about this before. But…"

She thought back to her teenage years, to her friends and their talks about romance and crushes. Yes, she had heard about this before, in bits and pieces, in whisperings and gossip.

But after further research, she had simply brushed it off as childish nonsense, as fantasy, something only found in stories and not reality.

She trailed off, her thoughts going back to Goku. It seemed so ridiculous, so surreal to even consider. Goku and unrequited love? It sounded absurd. But then again, what other explanation was there?

"But what?" Dr. Briefs prompted, seeing the gears turning in Bulma's mind.

She let out a long breath.

"It's just... it's hard to believe. I mean, Goku and unrequited love? It just doesn't seem... possible." She said, more to herself than her father. "He isn't pining after anyone. He's not the type to be in love with someone and keep quiet about it. He's too straightforward for that."

Dr. Briefs smiled slightly, the wrinkles around his eyes deepening. "You'd be surprised, dear. Love isn't always as obvious or straightforward as you may think. And unrequited love... well, it has a way of sneaking up on you. Even the simplest, kindest hearts can be affected."

Bulma's mind was racing. If this was true, if this disease *was* caused by unrequited love and Goku was affected, then that meant he was in love. But with *who* ? And why hadn't he said anything? It just didn't make sense.

"This is so messed up," she muttered. "If this hanahaki disease is real, then..."

Dr. Briefs interrupted her, his voice sympathetic. "Then, you need to find out who Goku's in love with. And fast. If he's coughing up flowers, it means the disease is advancing. The longer it goes untreated, the worse it'll get."

Bulma couldn't believe what she was hearing. Love, unrequited love, and some random supernatural illness were not part of her medical repertoire. Medicine was supposed to be

about facts, not feelings and love. Yet, the more her father spoke, the more she couldn't shake the feeling that he might be right.

Bulma nodded, her mind working overtime. Despite her skepticism, she realized her father had a point. She needed to keep all possibilities on the table, even the ones that seemed outlandish.

"...Fine, I guess I'll have to dig deeper into this," she said, more to herself than to her father. "In the meantime, I need to give Goku more medication soon. I should also probably have him stick to a liquid diet for now. It's best not to strain his system too much with solids until we figure out what's going on for certain."

Dr. Briefs patted her shoulder, understanding the complexity of her situation. "That sounds like a good plan, dear. Just remember to keep and open mind as you're researching, sometimes the answers can be found in the most unexpected places."

With a final nod, he left the lab, leaving Bulma alone with her computer.

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END CHAPTER 6

Chapter 7

Story: A Heart's Bloom, Chapter 7

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Despite how convincing of an argument her father had made, Bulma was still unsure of what to believe. Her scientific mind told her that there had to be a logical explanation, a medical reason for Goku's condition. But the more she researched, the more the symptoms seemed to line up with what Goku was experiencing.

Her mind then wandered back to her childhood friend and the possibility of him being in love. Who could it be? It had to be someone she knew, right? Unless it was some new girl he had met, or maybe he had fallen back in love with Chichi, but that seemed unlikely. Goku was straightforward and wore his heart on his sleeve; if he was in love, he would say something, wouldn't he? Unless he was afraid of rejection, and thought the person wouldn't feel the same way…

"This is so damn complicated," Bulma muttered to herself, her eyes flickering over the articles and studies popping up on the computer screen. No matter how hard she looked, she couldn't find any definitive answers. It was like the more she tried to understand, the more the truth slipped away from her, wrapped in the mystery of a disease that shouldn't even exist.

Bulma finally pushed away from the computer, rubbing her eyes wearily. The information was all starting to blur together, and she couldn't focus on it anymore. She needed a break.

She stood up and stretched, her muscles protesting from sitting in one position for so long. Grabbing Goku's medication, she headed towards his room. When she reached it, she knocked softly on the door before entering.

The room was dimly lit, and Goku was lying in bed, his eyes half-open, his breathing slightly labored. She approached the bed, perching on the edge.

"Hey," she said softly, reaching for his hand resting on the blankets. "I brought your pain medication, Goku."

Vegeta, who was sitting at Goku's bedside with his arms crossed, glanced up, his face still stern. He acknowledged her with a brief nod, his eyes flickering between her and Goku. He was uncharacteristically silent, his mind a tangled mess of worry, confusion, and a sense of helplessness.

He watched as Bulma checked Goku's vitals, gave him his medication, and then began to make arrangements for the liquid food diet. He could see the concern and the determination in her eyes, and he knew she was trying everything she could to help Goku.

Despite his own worries, Vegeta couldn't help but admire Bulma's relentless determination. She had always been the brains behind their team, her intelligence and resourcefulness often saving their hides. But seeing her like this, determined to find a solution to this mysterious disease, reminded him why he had fallen in love with her in the first place. And although his feelings for her had changed since then, he still had a lot of respect for her.

Goku groaned softly as the morphine took effect. This time, she had diluted it however, making the pain somewhat more tolerable. Nevertheless, he still winced, his body weakened and sensitive to any extra strain.

Bulma noticed Goku's reaction and quickly reassured him. "It's alright, Goku. I've adjusted the medicine a bit, so it should be easier on your body. Just try to relax, okay? I'll inject it slowly this time."

Goku managed a weak nod, his eyes half-lidded. It was still a little painful, but the morphine being diluted provided some relief. He let his head fall back against the pillows, focusing on his breathing as Bulma gently administered the injection.

Once the injection was done, Bulma stepped back and ran a hand through her hair. "Listen, I'm going to have someone bring you some food from the cafeteria now, alright? Since it's a liquid diet, it should be easier for you to handle. Try to eat a little bit when it arrives."

Goku nodded slowly, his voice sounding a bit hoarse. "Thanks, Bulma..."

Bulma smiled back. "No problem. Just rest and focus on getting better, okay?" She gave his hand another gentle squeeze before exiting the room.

Once she was gone, Goku was left alone with his thoughts. He could still feel the lingering pain and the tightness in his chest, but it was dulled thanks to the medication. The room was silent except for the sound of his own labored breathing.

A part of him ached to be up and about, training and being active like he usually was. But the reality of his condition held him prisoner in this bed, forcing him to accept he wasn't invincible, after all.

He soon found his thoughts interrupted by a soft knock on the door, and a staff member entered with a tray of food. The sight of food made Goku's stomach rumble in a way that felt almost foreign to him.

The staff member smiled kindly and placed the tray on the bedside table. "I have your meal, Mr. Son, as per Ms. Bulma's instructions."

Goku mumbled his thanks to the staff member, looking at the tray filled with various liquids. There was broth, jello, ice cream, and some fruit juices.

As Goku's gaze lingered on the tray, Vegeta, who had been silently watching, noticed his reluctance. "You should eat something."

"I know," Goku said, his voice barely above a whisper. "I just... I don't really have much appetite right now."

Vegeta scowled, his irritation clear on his face. "Appetite or not, you need to keep your strength up. Otherwise, won't have the energy to fight whatever it is causing this."

Goku knew Vegeta was right, even if he didn't want to admit it. So, with a sigh, he picked up a spoonful of broth and ate it. It was good, and thanks to the pain medication Bulma had given him, his throat wasn't nearly as sore right now so he was actually able to swallow it.

Vegeta watched him silently, his expression still stern, but there was a hint of relief in his eyes. It was good that he was eating, even if it was only a small amount.

"And make sure you finish it all," he ordered gruffly. "Bulma's doing everything she can to help you, but you have to do your part too. Understand?"

"I will…" Goku reluctantly took another mouthful of broth, the warm liquid sliding down his throat and bringing some sense of normalcy. He hadn't even realized how hungry or thirsty he even was until he started eating.

Goku slowly worked his way through the meal, finishing the broth and jello relatively easily. The coldness of the jello was a nice contrast to the warm broth, and it felt good going down his throat.

With the broth and jello finished, Goku's eyes moved to the ice cream, still untouched on the plate. turned his gaze to the ice cream, before staring at it for a moment. "It's bubble gum flavored? That's... odd."

Vegeta, who had watched him eat, raised an eyebrow at Goku's comment. "Something wrong with bubble gum flavored?"

"No, I've just... Never heard of it before..." Goku noted.

Vegeta was taken aback by Goku's response.

"You've never heard of bubble gum ice cream before?" he asked, surprised. "Where have you been living, under a rock?"

Goku laughed weakly, shaking his head.

"No, not living under a rock," he managed. "Just... never had the chance to try it, I guess. Not something I can afford on a regular basis, y'know?"

Vegeta's eyes widened slightly. While Goku's family wasn't exactly poor per say, they also didn't have the kind of money to splurge on whatever they wanted. More often than not, they had just enough to cover their basic necessities. Most of the food they had was stuff that Goku either caught or farmed himself.

He supposed it was just yet another reminder of the stark contrasts in their lives. But still… It was just ice cream, it shouldn't have been *that* big of a deal, right? Then again, Goku was a simple person. Outside of fighting, he never asked for much.

"Well, you're having it now, aren't you?" He said gruffly, looking away and trying to hide the empathy he was feeling. "So stop staring and eat it already, before it starts melting."

Goku tried a spoonful of it, his eyes widening in surprise. It was like nothing he'd ever tasted before. The sweet, sugary flavor of bubble gum mingled with the coolness of the ice cream, creating an explosion of sweetness in his mouth.

"Wow...." he mumbled, his face lighting up with childlike wonder. "This tastes delicious!"

"You really like it that much, huh?" Vegeta said, a slight hint of amusement in his tone.

But as goku took another bite, licking his lips and humming in satisfaction, Vegeta shifted uncomfortably, feeling heat rising within him. He observed Goku's blissful expression and

the way he savored each bite, his tongue darting out to lap up the melting treat.

Vegeta had never seen somebody enjoy something so simple with such obvious delight, but something about his unabashed pleasure was… Arousing.

Fuck!

He quickly looked away, his cheeks red. He scolded himself internally for responding this way. This wasn't the time or place for this.

…

The room had fallen into a brief silence after Goku finished his meal, the soft hum of the air conditioner filling the room. He sat up in bed, his gaze fixed out the window at the large full moon in the night sky.

Goku's expression had grown a bit somber, his thoughts seemingly elsewhere. The silvery light of the moon highlighted his weary features, making him look even more pensive.

Vegeta, who had been silently observing, noticed the change in Goku's demeanor. He had known Goku long enough to know when something was bothering him.

"Something on your mind?" he asked gruffly, breaking the silence.

Goku paused for a moment before answering, his gaze wavering.

"Mnmn." He shook his head, smiling weakly. "No, it's nothing."

Vegeta huffed, obviously not believing him.

"You're a terrible liar, Kakarot." he retorted, his arms crossing over his chest. "I know that look. Something's eating at you. Out with it."

Goku looked down, as if he wanted to say something, but in the end he let out a small cough, trying to sit up. "Don't worry about it. It's not that important. If you don't mind, though, I'd kinda like to take a bath. I feel sticky."

Vegeta raised an eyebrow, clearly unconvinced that it wasn't important, but he let it slide for now. He could always pry later. Right now, Goku asking to take a bath was a much more pressing concern.

"Fine, but you think you can even stay upright long enough to do that?" he questioned, a hint of skepticism in his tone.

"I'm actually not sure." Goku struggled to reply. "You might have to carry me again."

Vegeta huffed once more, rolling his eyes.

"Seriously…? You're too heavy, you know that?" he grumbled, getting up from his chair. "But I guess I don't have much choice, do I?"

He walked over to the side of the bed, and for yet another time that day, scooped Goku up into his arms.

He carried him to the bathroom, careful that he didn't jostle him too much. Once inside, he carefully set Goku on the toilet.

"How hot do you want the water?" he asked.

Goku was already starting to feel a bit dizzy just from sitting up, but he managed to give a small smile. "Just warm, I think. I don't want to pass out in the tub."

Vegeta nodded and reached over to start the water. He waited a few moments, testing the temperature, until it was just right. Then he turned back to Goku. "Alright, it's ready. Think you can manage getting undressed on your own?"

Goku grimaced. He tried to move, but the dizziness made it hard. "Can you... help me out? I'm still a bit dizzy."

"...Fine, but you owe me for this," Vegeta grumbled and let out a small sigh, blushing furiously. Helping someone else get undressed wasn't normally something he did.

When Vegeta reached for his pants buckle, Goku couldn't help but feel a bit of embarrassment, his cheeks becoming a light hue of pink.

Vegeta's hands were surprisingly gentle as he worked at the fastenings of Goku's pants, his fingers deftly undoing the buckle and tugging at the zipper. He could feel Goku's embarrassment, the way he was blushing slightly, and he couldn't help but find it a bit endearing.

He pulled his pants down, leaving Goku in just his boxers. He didn't look away, his gaze taking in every dip and contour of Goku's body, the sharp lines of his hips and the strength of his thighs.

He swallowed hard, the sight of Goku's body sending a jolt of desire through him. But he quickly squashed the feeling, reminding himself that this wasn't about that. This was about taking care of Goku in his weakened state, nothing more.

He reached up and gently hooked his fingers under the elastic of Goku's boxers, starting to pull them down. He moved slowly, giving Goku time to stop him if he wanted.

But Goku didn't protest. He lifted his hips slightly to make it easier, his eyes shut in embarrassment. It felt strange to have Vegeta helping him like this, but truth be told, it felt nice, even if it was a little awkward.

Vegeta couldn't help but notice the way Goku's body quivered faintly beneath his touch, the way the muscles in his abdomen tensed and relaxed.

He let the boxers fall to the floor, leaving Goku half naked. He tried to keep his eyes from roaming too freely over Goku's body, but it was hard. Goku's skin was flawless, soft and well toned, tempting him to reach out and touch him, to feel the heat of his skin against his palm.

He crouched down, his hands moving to Goku's feet. "Lift your foot."

Goku obeyed, lifting his foot slightly off the floor. Vegeta's hands wrapped around his ankle, carefully helping him out of his pants and underwear.

With each item of clothing removed, more and more of Goku's body was revealed, the lean contour of his muscles gleaming under the bathroom lights. It wasn't like Vegeta had never seen him naked before, but it was proving to be more distracting than he cared to admit.

His hands were steady as he maneuvered Goku's arms out of his sleeves, the fabric slipping off and leaving him bare chested.

He let the shirt fall to the floor, his eyes roaming over the newly exposed skin. The broad expanse of Goku's chest and the ridges of his abdominal muscles were almost hypnotic, and he couldn't resist the urge to lightly brush his fingers over the smooth surface.

But he quickly snapped out of it, having to remind himself yet again that he needed to focus on washing Goku and getting him cleaned up, not on how damn good he looked without a shirt on.

He forced his eyes back to Goku's face, once again taking notice of the flush on his cheeks and the slight rise and fall of his chest. He swallowed hard at the sight, silently cursing himself for his own reaction.

"I'm putting you in the tub now." He scooped him up back up and carefully lowered him in. Goku let out a sigh of relief as the warmth enveloped his body.

Vegeta let out a quiet huff, realizing that Goku wouldn't be able to do much in his current state. Sitting at the edge of the tub, and making sure Goku didn't sink into the water, he grabbed a cloth and some soap, grumbling something incomprehensive underneath his breath.

Goku relaxed as Vegeta began to massage some soap over his body and into his hair. The soft, warm water and the gentle touch of Vegeta's hands eased the pain and tension in his body. Some part of him wanted him to touch him more, but he kept that thought to himself, knowing it was inappropriate and wouldn't be appreciated.

Vegeta tried his best to focus on what he was doing, his hands moving over Goku's skin in a methodical, almost clinical way. But the feeling of Goku's body under his fingers, the warmth of the water - it was all starting to get to him. He could feel his own body reacting, a slow, growing heat starting to pool in the pit of his stomach. He forced himself to ignore it, concentrating on the task at hand.

He worked the cloth over Goku's shoulders, down his arms, and over his chest, his touch firm but gentle. It was taking all of his willpower to not let them wander too long, to not let them explore the curves and planes of Goku's body more freely.

Goku's eyes were closed, a peaceful expression on his face. He let out a soft sigh as Vegeta worked the cloth over his skin, the warm water and the gentle touch soothing him.

A part of him wanted to lean back into the touch, to feel more of Vegeta's hands on him, but he kept those thoughts to himself, not sure if they would be welcome. Instead, he let himself be pampered, enjoying the simple pleasure of being cared for.

Vegeta's touch was efficient, the soap lathered over Goku's body like a practiced dance. He moved down Goku's stomach and over his abdomen, the cloth caressing the dips and ridges of his muscles.

Vegeta's heart was pounding in his chest, the heat of the water, the feel of Goku's body under his hands, it was all making it hard for him to concentrate.

He moved the cloth lower, his hand brushing over Goku's hip, his fingers gliding over the smooth skin. He swallowed hard, his eyes flicking up to Goku's face for a moment, making sure he was still calm and relaxed.

Goku's expression was peaceful, his eyes still closed, his body a picture of tranquility. It was clear the idiot was enjoying being pampered like this, and his complacency only made it harder for Vegeta to keep his urges in check.

But Goku was weak and vulnerable. Vegeta knew he couldn't take advantage of him like that. He had to keep his emotions under control. He forced his thoughts back to the task at hand, the cloth continuing its journey over Goku's legs and feet, his touch firm but gentle on his muscles. He kept his eyes fixed on what he was doing, not looking away but refusing to let his gaze wander over the expanse of Goku's exposed body.

When he was done, he set the cloth aside and took a deep breath, trying to steady himself. Finally, he picked up a bottle of shampoo and poured some into his hands, massaging it into Goku's hair.

Goku let out a small moan as Vegeta's hands worked the shampoo into his hair, the gentle pressure on his scalp sending a wave of relaxation through his body. It felt incredible.

As his fingers combed through the strands, Vegeta let his gaze roam over Goku's face, taking in the relaxed expression and slight flush on his cheeks. Once the shampoo was thoroughly worked in, he reached for the showerhead and slowly rinsed out the suds.

The warm water cascaded over Goku's head, leaving his hair clean and fragrant. Vegeta couldn't help but admire the way the water ran over Goku's face, the way it clung to his

eyelashes and dripped down his neck.

"Thanks for helping me out by the way. You're a lifesaver." Goku murmured, his voice hoarse as Vegeta turned the water off and unplugged the drain.

"Don't mention it." The prince grunted in acknowledgement, grabbing a towel. He took a moment to dry off the damp strands of Goku's hair, before moving down to his neck and shoulders, the rough texture of the towel rubbing against the soft, wet skin. He could feel the way his muscles flexed beneath his touch, and the way the heat of Goku's body seemed to seep into his own, making it difficult to carry out the task without distraction. "You're clean now."

He tried not to stare as he lifted Goku out of the tub and setting him down on the closed toilet lid, a bit of water dripping onto the floor. He then wrapped the towel around Goku's waist to provide a bit of modesty, trying to ignore the thoughts and feelings that were rapidly swirling through his head.

"Stay here," he said, before leaving the bathroom momentarily. He returned a few seconds later with a hairdryer in hand.

He plugged the hairdryer into an outlet and switched it on, the sound of the motor filling the bathroom. He then moved closer to Goku, lifting the hairdryer and beginning to run it through his damp hair. He directed the hot air over Goku's head, trying to get him as dry as possible. After several minutes, he turned off the hairdryer and set it aside.

Vegeta then grabbed the pile of dirty clothes and walked over to the hamper in the corner of the bathroom. He roughly tossed them inside, the sound of fabric hitting the woven basket breaking the silence.

He paused for a moment, contemplating the situation. Goku was still too weak to put on clothes himself, and he needed something comfortable to wear. Vegeta made a mental note to go find him a suitable nightshirt or gown.

He turned back to Goku, his gaze lingering on the man for a moment. "I'll go find you something to wear. Stay right here."

Without waiting for an answer, he walked out of the bathroom, heading for the wardrobe in the bedroom. Inside, he began to rifle through the neatly folded clothes, looking for something suitable. His mind was still a jumble of thoughts from the recent events, each one more confusing than the last.

His eyes drifted over the various pieces of clothing, finally landing on a soft cotton nightgown. It was large and loose-fitting, with a light material and a comfortable design. It would be perfect considering Goku's current condition.

He picked it up, also grabbing a pair of boxers to go with it, before heading back to the bathroom.

When he returned, he found Goku sitting exactly as he left him, wrapped in the towel, but looking a little paler than before. His head lolled to the side, his eyes seeming unfocused.

"Here," Vegeta grunted, holding up the nightgown. "It's the best I could find on short notice. Give me your hands…"

Goku obediently lifted his hands and allowed Vegeta to guide them into the sleeves of the nightgown, one at a time before Vegeta lifted the nightgown over his head and helped him slip it on. Once it was on, it looked a bit oversized, the material pooling at Goku's thighs, but it was comfortable and practical.

Vegeta then knelt down in front of Goku, adjusting the nightgown so it would not wrinkle unnecessarily. With quick and efficient movement, he grabbed the boxers and started to pull them up Goku's legs, one at a time.

As he did, he was hyper-aware of the intimacy of the situation. He could feel the warmth of Goku's legs, the smoothness of his skin, and the way the nightgown gently fell over him as he moved.

He quickly finished putting on Goku's boxers, trying to ignore the strange thrill he felt from being so close to him, the way his heart was beating a little faster.

"There," he muttered, taking a step back. He brushed a strand of hair out of Goku's face but didn't move away completely. "Now you look less like a bedraggled mess."

Goku didn't respond. The medication and the day's exertion had clearly taken their toll. Vegeta wanted to speak, to express the confusing mix of emotions swirling within him, but he didn't know how. So he held his tongue, watching as Goku slumped back against the toilet seat and leaned his head against the wall behind him.

As much as he hated to admit it, he wanted to make sure Goku was comfortable, even if that required a bit more intimacy than he was okay with.

"Come on, we're getting you back to bed." He gently slid his arms under Goku's legs and around his back, hoisting him up with a soft grunt.

Ignoring the fluttering in his chest, he navigated through the hallway, trying not to jostle Goku too much as he walked. The man was practically half-asleep at this point, his head resting against Vegeta's shoulder.

He reached the bedroom and gently laid Goku back down on the bed, before shifting his body into a comfortable position. But as his fingers suddenly brushed against the bare skin of Goku's thighs, he couldn't help the way his face heated up.

He pulled the gown back into place, his fingers moving quickly and efficiently to cover Goku's exposed skin. As he laid the quilt over him, his heart hammered in his chest, the fluttering in his stomach and getting stronger.

Why does this blasted fool have to be so damn attractive?

Vegeta let out a frustrated sigh and took a seat in a chair beside Goku's bedside. As he watched the steady rise and fall of Goku's chest and the way his hair spilled across the pillow, he couldn't help but be drawn to the dip between his shoulder and neck. He found himself wondering what it would be like to kiss it.

Vegeta cursed himself for letting his imagination run wild, but the images of Goku's bare legs and soft skin were like a fire in his mind, consuming his every thought.

He wanted to reach out and touch him. To feel his body against his own-

FuckfuckFUCK!

Vegeta ran a hand through his hair in desperation, trying to steady his racing heart.

He shifted in his chair in an attempt to find a more comfortable position, but the tightness of his pants was impossible to ignore. The fabric felt constricting and uncomfortable against his skin, the sensation only making the situation worse.

"What the hell is wrong with me…?" He cursed under his breath, his cheeks heating with both arousal and embarrassment, wanting more than anything to shake off the feelings that were coursing through his veins.

He glanced down at Goku again, the sight of his relaxed form on the bed doing nothing to cool his heated blood.

Finally, he couldn't take it anymore. He had to get out of there, he need air and space to clear his head of these thoughts and feelings.

Again.

He stood up abruptly, causing the chair to screech against the floor. The noise was loud in the quiet room, causing Goku to wake back up.

"What's goin' on?" Goku mumbled groggily, sitting up and rubbing his eyes as Vegeta was heading to the door. "Where're you going?"

"I'm just going out for a walk," Vegeta replied, not even turning around to look at Goku. His voice was gruff and tense, betraying the inner turmoil he was experiencing. "I need some air. I'll be back in a few minutes."

Goku's brows furrowed slightly. He knew something was off. Vegeta's tone, his body language... there was something he wasn't telling him. But he knew better than to push the issue further.

"Oh, okay," he said quietly, the words barely above a whisper. It was just a few minutes, right?

Vegeta gave Goku one last glance, before quickly turning and heading out of the room. The moment he was outside, he let out a breath he didn't know he'd been holding in, but it did little to soothe the turmoil inside him.

He couldn't stop picturing Goku's body under the quilt, remembering the way his soft skin felt under his fingertips, imagine the sounds he would make if he-

Why is this bothering me so much?

He clenched his fists, gritting his teeth in frustration.

This would be so much easier if we could just go back to the way things were before.

With a huff of irritation, he stormed off to the gravity chamber.

Training would be the only sure fire way to get this out of his head.

…

END CHAPTER 7

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